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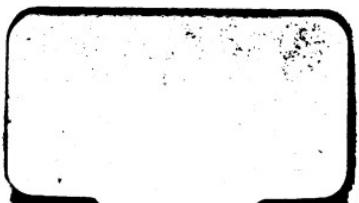
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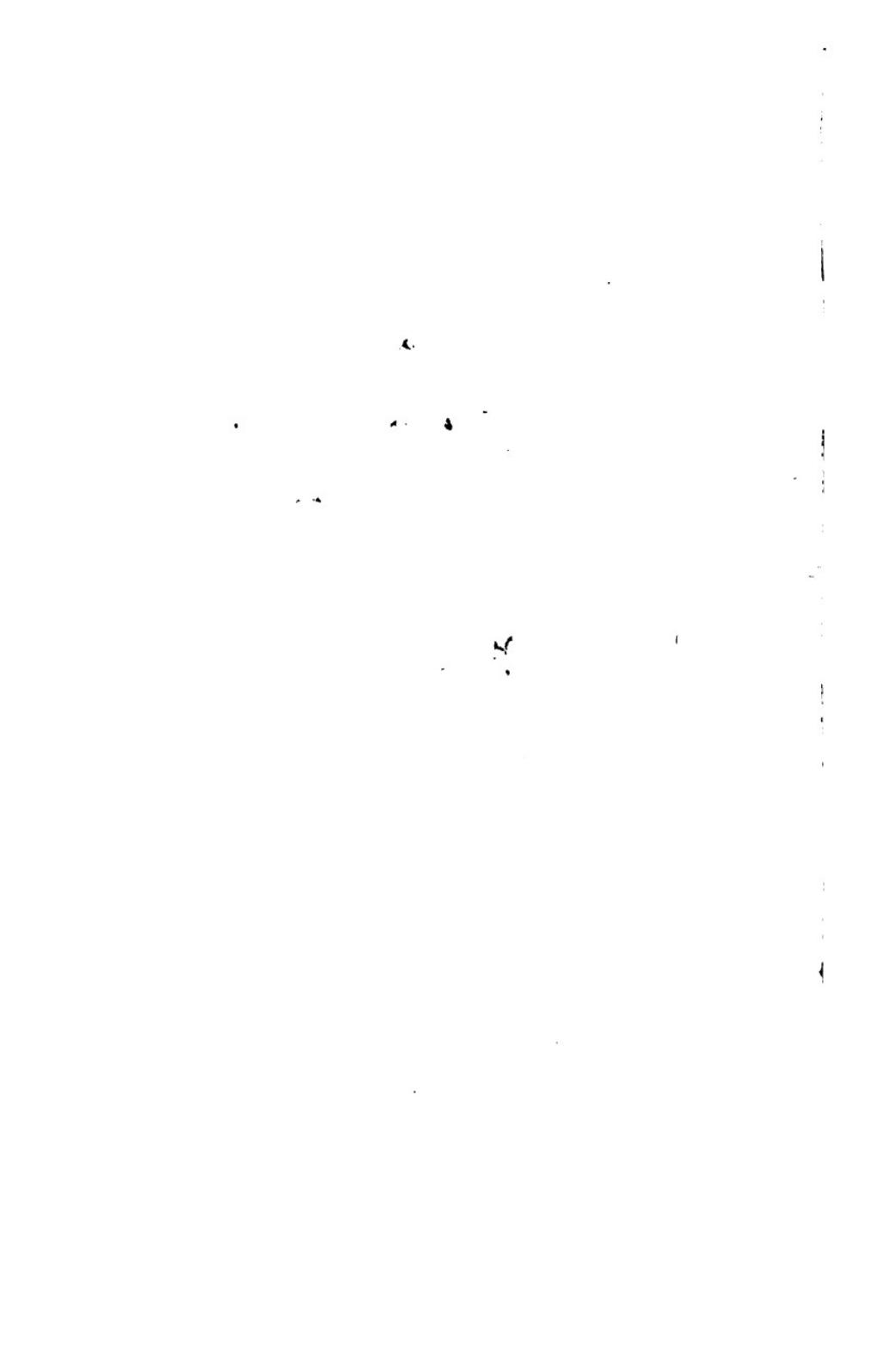
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Madame Bovary

CRITICISMS
AND
DRAMATIC ESSAYS
OF THE
ENGLISH STAGE.

BY
WILLIAM HAZLITT.

“FOR I AM NOTHING IF NOT CRITICAL.”

Second Edition.

EDITED BY HIS SON.

LONDON:
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AUTHOR'S PREFACE.

THE Stage is one great source of public amusement, not to say instruction. A good play, well acted, passes away a whole evening delightfully at a certain period of life, agreeably at all times ; we read the account of it next morning with pleasure, and it generally furnishes one leading topic of conversation for the afternoon. The disputes on the merits or defects of the last new piece, or of a favourite performer, are as common, as frequently renewed, and carried on with as much eagerness and skill, as those on almost any other subject. Rochefoucalt, I believe it was, who said that the reason why lovers were so fond of one another's company was, that they were always talking about themselves. The same reason

almost might be given for the interest we feel in talking about plays and players; they are "the brief chronicles of the time," the epitome of human life and manners. While we are talking about them, we are thinking about ourselves. They "hold the mirror up to nature;" and our thoughts are turned to the stage as naturally and as fondly as a fine lady turns to contemplate her face in the glass. It is a glass, too, in which the wise may see themselves; but in which the vain and superficial see their own virtues, and laugh at the follies of others. The curiosity which every one has to know how his voice and manner can be mimicked, must have been remarked or felt by most of us. It is no wonder, then, that we should feel the same sort of curiosity and interest in seeing those whose business it is to "imitate humanity" in general, and who do it sometimes "abominably," at other times admirably. Of these, some record is due to the world; but the player's art is one that perishes with him, and leaves no traces of itself, but in the faint descriptions of the pen or pencil. Yet how eagerly do we stop to look at the prints from Zoffany's pictures of Garrick

and Weston ! How much we are vexed, that so much of Colley Cibber's life is taken up with the accounts of his own managership, and so little with those inimitable portraits which he has occasionally given of the actors of his time ! How fortunate we think ourselves, when we can meet with any person who remembers the principal performers of the last age, and who can give us some distant idea of Garrick's nature, or of Abington's grace ! We are always indignant at Smollett, for having introduced a perverse caricature of the English Roscius, which staggers our faith in his faultless excellence while reading it. On the contrary, we are pleased to collect anecdotes of this celebrated actor, which shew his power over the human heart, and enable us to measure his genius with that of others by its effects. I have heard, for instance, that once, when Garrick was acting Lear, the spectators in the front row of the pit, not being able to see him well in the kneeling scene, when he utters the curse, rose up, when those behind them, not willing to interrupt the scene by remonstrating, immediately rose up too, and in this manner the

whole pit rose up, without uttering a syllable, and so that you might hear a pin drop. At another time, the crown of straw which he wore in the same character fell off, or was discomposed, which would have produced a burst of laughter at any common actor to whom such an accident had happened; but such was the deep interest in the character, and such the ✓ power of rivetting the attention possessed by this actor, that not the slightest notice was taken of the circumstances, but the whole audience remained bathed in silent tears. The knowledge of circumstances like these, serves to keep alive the memory of past excellence, and to stimulate future efforts. It was thought that a work containing a detailed account of the stage in our own times—a period not unfruitful in theatrical genius—might not be wholly without its use.

The volume here offered to the public is a collection of Theatrical Criticisms which have appeared, with little interruption, during the last four years, in different newspapers—the Morning Chronicle, the Champion, the Examiner, and lastly, the Times. How I came

to be regularly transferred from one of these papers to the other, sometimes formally and sometimes without ceremony, till I was forced to quit the last-mentioned by want of health and leisure, would make rather an amusing story, but that I do not choose to tell "the secrets of the prison-house." I would, however, advise any one who has an ambition to write, and to write *his best*, in the periodical press, to get if possible a position in the Times newspaper, the Editor of which is a man of business, and not of letters. He may write there as long and as good articles as he can, without being turned out for it.

The best articles in this series appeared originally in the Morning Chronicle. They are those relating to Mr. Kean. I went to see him the first night of his appearing in Shylock. I remember it well. The boxes were empty, and the pit not half full: "some quantity of barren spectators and idle renters were thinly scattered to make up a show." The whole presented a dreary, hopeless aspect. I was in considerable apprehension for the result. From

the first scene in which Mr. Kean came on, my doubts were at an end. I had been told to give as favourable an account as I could : I gave a true one. I am not one of those who, when they see the sun breaking from behind a cloud, stop to ask others whether it is the moon. Mr. Kean's appearance was the first gleam of genius breaking athwart the gloom of the stage, and the public have since gladly basked in its ray, in spite of actors, managers, and critics. I cannot say that my opinion has much changed since that time. Why should it ? I had the same eyes to see with that I have now, the same ears to hear with, and the same understanding to judge with. Why then should I not form the same judgment ? My opinions have been sometimes called singular : they are merely sincere. I say what I think : I think what I feel. I cannot help receiving certain impressions from things ; and I have sufficient courage to declare (somewhat abruptly) what they are. This is the only singularity I am conscious of. I do not shut my eyes to extraordinary merit because I hate it, and refuse to open them till the clamours of others

make me, and then affect to wonder extravagantly at what I have before affected hypocritically to despise. I do not make it a common practice to think nothing of an actor or an author, because all the world have not pronounced in his favour ; and after they have, to persist in condemning him, as a proof not of imbecility and ill-nature, but of independence of taste and spirit. Nor do I endeavour to communicate the infection of my own dulness, cowardice, and spleen to others, by chilling the coldness of their constitutions with the poisonous slime of vanity or interest, and setting up my own conscious inability or unwillingness to form an opinion on any one subject, as the height of candour and judgment. —I did not endeavour to persuade Mr. Perry that Mr. Kean was an actor that would not last, merely because he had not lasted ; nor that Miss Stephens knew nothing of singing, because she had a sweet voice. On the contrary, I did all I could to counteract the effect of these safe, not very sound, insinuations, and “ screw the courage” of one principal organ of

public opinion “to the sticking-place.” I do not repent of having done so.

With respect to the spirit of partisanship in which the controversy respecting Mr. Kean’s merits as an actor was carried on, there were two or three things remarkable. One set of persons, out of the excess of their unbounded admiration, furnished him with all sorts of excellences which he did not possess or pretend to, and covered his defects from the wardrobe of their own fancies. With this class of persons,

“ Pritchard’s genteel, and Garrick’s six feet high!”

I never enlisted in this corps of Swiss body-guards ; I was even suspected of disloyalty and *leze-majesté*, because I did not cry out—*Quand même !* to all Mr. Kean’s stretches of the prerogatives of genius, and was placed out of the pale of theatrical orthodoxy for not subscribing implicitly to all the articles of belief imposed upon my senses and understanding. If you had not been to see the little man twenty times in Richard, and did not deny his being hoarse in the last act, or admire him for being so, you were looked on as a

lukewarm devotee, or half an infidel. On the other hand, his detractors constantly argued not from what he was, but from what he was not. "He was not tall. He had not a fine voice. He did not play at Covent Garden. He was not John Kemble." This was all you could get from them, and this they thought quite sufficient to prove that he was not any thing, because he was not something quite different from himself. They did not consider that an actor might have the eye of an eagle with the voice of a raven, a "pigmy body," and "a fiery soul that o'er-informed its tenement;" that he might want grace and dignity, and yet have enough nature and passion in his breast to set up a whole corps of regular stagers. They did not enquire whether this was the case with respect to Mr. Kean, but took it for granted that it was not, for no other reason than because the question had not been settled by the critics twenty or thirty years ago, and admitted by the town ever since, that is, before Mr. Kean was born. A royal infant may be described as "*un haut et puissant prince, agé d'un jour,*" but a great and powerful actor can-

not be known till he arrives at years of discretion; he must be first a candidate for theatrical reputation before he can be a veteran. This is a truism, but it is one that our prejudices constantly make us not only forget, but frequently combat with all the spirit of martyrdom. I have (as it will be seen in the following pages) all along spoken freely of Mr. Kean's faults, or what I considered such, physical as well as intellectual; but the balance inclines decidedly to the favourable side, though not more I think than his merits exceed his defects. It was also the more necessary to dwell on the claims of an actor to public support, in proportion as they were original, and to the illiberal opposition they unhappily had to encounter. I endeavoured to prove (and with some success) that he was not "the very worst actor in the world." His Othello is what appears to me his master-piece. To those who have seen him in this part, and think little of it, I have nothing further to say. It seems to me, as far as the mind alone is concerned, and leaving the body out of the question, fully equal to any thing of Mrs. Siddons's. But I hate

such comparisons; and only make them on strong provocation.

Though I do not repent of what I have said in praise of certain actors, yet I wish I could retract what I have been obliged to say in reprobation of others. Public reputation is a lottery, in which there are blanks as well as prizes. The stage is an arduous profession, requiring so many essential excellences and accidental advantages, that though it is an honour and a happiness to succeed in it, it is only a misfortune, and not a disgrace, to fail in it. Those who put themselves upon their trial, must, however, submit to the verdict; and the critic in general does little more than prevent a lingering death, by anticipating, or putting in immediate force, the sentence of the public. The victims of criticism, like the victims of the law, bear no good will to their executioners; and I confess I have often been heartily tired of so thankless an office. What I have said of any actor, has never arisen from private pique of any sort. Indeed the only person on the stage with whom I have ever had any personal intercourse is Mr. Liston, and of him I have

not spoken "with the malice of a friend." I have said that Miss O'Neill shines more in tragedy than comedy; and that Mr. Mathews is an excellent mimic. I am sorry for these disclosures, which were extorted from me, but I cannot retract them. There is one observation which has been made, and which is true, that public censure hurts actors in a pecuniary point of view; but it has been forgotten, that public praise assists them in the same manner. Again, I never understood that the applauded actor thought himself personally obliged to the newspaper critic; the latter was merely supposed to do his duty. Why then should the critic be held responsible to the actor whom he *damns* by virtue of his office? Besides, as the mimic caricatures absurdity off the stage, why should not the critic sometimes caricature it on the stage? The children of Momus should not hold themselves sacred from ridicule. Though the colours may be a little heightened, the outline may be correct; and truth may be conveyed, and the public taste improved, by an alliteration or a quibble that wounds the self-love of an individual. Authors must live as

well as actors; and the *insipid* must at all events be avoided, as that which the public abhors most.



THE ENGLISH STAGE.

ON ACTORS AND ACTING.*

PLAYERS are "the abstracts and brief chronicles of the time;" the motley representatives of human nature. They are the only honest hypocrites. Their life is a voluntary dream; a studied madness. The height of their ambition is to be *beside themselves*. To-day kings, to-morrow beggars, it is only when they are themselves that they are nothing. Made up of mimic laughter and tears, passing from the extremes of joy or woe at the prompter's call, they wear the livery of other men's fortunes; their very thoughts are not their own. They are, as it were, train-bearers in the pageant of life, and hold a glass up to humanity, frailer than itself. We see ourselves at second-hand in them: they shew us all that we are, all that we wish to be, and all that we dread to be. The stage

* 1817.

is an epitome, a bettered likeness of the world, with the dull part left out : and, indeed, with this omission, it is nearly big enough to hold all the rest. What brings the resemblance nearer is that, as *they* imitate us, we, in our turn, imitate them. How many fine gentlemen do we owe to the stage ! How many romantic lovers are mere Romeos in masquerade ! How many soft bosoms have heaved with Juliet's sighs ! They teach us when to laugh and when to weep, when to love and when to hate, upon principle and with a good grace ! Wherever there is a play-house, the world will go on not amiss. The stage not only refines the manners, but it is the best teacher of morals, for it is the truest and most intelligible picture of life. It stamps the image of virtue on the mind by first softening the rude materials of which it is composed, by a sense of pleasure. It regulates the passions, by giving a loose to the imagination. It points out the selfish and depraved to our detestation ; the amiable and generous to our admiration ; and if it clothes the more seductive vices with the borrowed graces of wit and fancy, even those graces operate as a diversion to the coarser poison of experience and bad example, and often prevent or carry off the infection by inoculating the mind with a certain taste and elegance. To shew how little we agree with the common declamations

against the immoral tendency of the stage on this score, we will hazard a conjecture that the acting of the Beggar's Opera a certain number of nights every year since it was first brought out has done more towards putting down the practice of highway robbery, than all the gibbets that ever were erected. A person, after seeing this piece, is too deeply imbued with a sense of humanity, is in too good humour with himself and the rest of the world, to set about cutting throats or rifling pockets. Whatever makes a jest of vice leaves it too much a matter of indifference for any one in his senses to rush desperately on his ruin for its sake. We suspect that just the contrary effect must be produced by the representation of George Barnwell, which is too much in the style of the Ordinary's sermon to meet with any better success. The mind, in such cases, instead of being deterred by the alarming consequences held out to it, revolts against the denunciation of them as an insult offered to its free-will, and, in a spirit of defiance, returns a practical answer to them, by daring the worst that can happen. The most striking lesson ever read to levity and licentiousness is in the last act of the Inconstant, where young Mirabel is preserved by the fidelity of his mistress, Orinda, in the disguise of a page, from the hands of assassins, into whose power he had been allured by the tempta-

tions of vice and beauty. There never was a rake who did not become in imagination a reformed man, during the representation of the last trying scenes of this admirable comedy.

If the stage is useful as a school of instruction, it is no less so as a source of amusement. It is a source of the greatest enjoyment at the time, and a never-failing fund of agreeable reflection afterwards. The merits of a new play, or of a new actor, are always among the first topics of polite conversation. One way in which public exhibitions contribute to refine and humanise mankind, is by supplying them with ideas and subjects of conversation and interest in common. The progress of civilization is in proportion to the number of common-places current in society. For instance, if we meet with a stranger at an inn or in a stage-coach, who knows nothing but his own affairs—his shop, his customers, his farm, his pigs, his poultry—we can carry on no conversation with him on these local and personal matters : the only way is to let him have all the talk to himself. But if he has fortunately ever seen Mr. Liston act, this is an immediate topic of mutual conversation, and we agree together the rest of the evening in discussing the merits of that inimitable actor, with the same satisfaction as in talking over the affairs of the most intimate friend.

If the stage thus introduces us familiarly to our contemporaries, it also brings us acquainted with former times. It is an interesting revival of past ages, manners, opinions, dresses, persons, and actions,—whether it carries us back to the wars of York and Lancaster, or half way back to the heroic times of Greece and Rome, in some translation from the French, or quite back to the age of Charles II. in the scenes of Congreve and of Etherege (the gay Sir George!)—happy age, when kings and nobles led purely ornamental lives ; when the utmost stretch of a morning's study went no farther than the choice of a sword-knot, or the adjustment of a side curl ; when the soul spoke out in all the pleasing elegance of dress ; and beaux and belles, enamoured of themselves in one another's follies, fluttered like gilded butterflies in giddy mazes through the walks of St. James's Park !

A good company of comedians, a Theatre-Royal judiciously managed, is your true Herald's College ; the only Antiquarian Society that is worth a rush. It is for this reason that there is such an air of romance about players, and that it is pleasanter to see them, even in their own persons, than any of the three learned professions. We feel more respect for John Kemble in a plain coat than for the Lord Chancellor on the woolsack. He is surrounded, to

our eyes, with a greater number of imposing recollections : he is a more reverend piece of formality ; a more complicated tissue of costume. We do not know whether to look upon this accomplished actor as Pierre, or King John, or Coriolanus, or Cato, or Leontes, or the Stranger. But we see in him a stately hieroglyphic of humanity ; a living monument of departed greatness ; a sombre comment on the rise and fall of kings. We look after him till he is out of sight, as we listen to a story of one of Ossian's heroes, to "a tale of other times!"

The most pleasant feature in the profession of a player, and which, indeed, is peculiar to it, is that we not only admire the talents of those who adorn it, but we contract a personal intimacy with them. There is no class of society whom so many persons regard with affection as actors. We greet them on the stage ; we like to meet them in the streets ; they almost always recall to us pleasant associations ; and we feel our gratitude excited, without the uneasiness of a sense of obligation. The very gaiety and popularity, however, which surround the life of a favourite performer, make the retiring from it a very serious business. It glances a mortifying reflection on the shortness of human life, and the vanity of human pleasures. Something reminds us that "all the world's a stage, and all the men and women merely players."

It has been considered as the misfortune of first-rate talents for the stage, that they leave no record behind them except that of vague rumour, and that the genius of a great actor perishes with him, "leaving the world no copy." This is a misfortune, or at least a mortifying reflection, to actors; but it is, perhaps, an advantage to the stage. It leaves an opening to originality. The *semper varium et mutabile* of the poet may be transferred to the stage, "the inconstant stage," without losing the original felicity of the application:—it has its necessary ebbs and flows, from its subjection to the influence of popular feeling, and the frailty of the materials of which it is composed, its own fleeting and shadowy essence, and cannot be expected to remain for any great length of time stationary at the same point, either of perfection or debasement. Acting, in particular, which is the chief organ by which it addresses itself to the mind—the eye, tongue, hand by which it dazzles, charms, and seizes on the public attention—is an art that seems to contain in itself the seeds of perpetual renovation and decay, following in this respect the order of nature rather than the analogy of the productions of human intellect:—for whereas in the other arts of painting and poetry, the standard works of genius, being permanent and accumulating, for awhile provoke emulation, but, in the end, over-

lay future efforts, and transmit only their defects to those that come after ; the exertions of the greatest actor die with him, leaving to his successors only the admiration of his name, and the aspiration after imaginary excellence : so that, in effect, no one generation of actors binds another ; the art is always setting out afresh on the stock of genius and nature, and the success depends (generally speaking) on accident, opportunity, and encouragement. The harvest of excellence (whatever it may be) is removed from the ground, every twenty or thirty years, by Death's sickle ; and there is room left for another to sprout up and tower to any equal height, and spread into equal luxuriance—to “dally with the wind, and court the sun”—according to the health and vigour of the stem, and the favourableness of the season. But books, pictures, remain like fixtures in the public mind, beyond a certain point encumber the soil of living truth and nature, distort or stunt the growth of original genius. When an author dies, it is no matter, for his works remain. When a great actor dies, there is a void produced in society, a gap which requires to be filled up. The literary amateur may find employment for his time in reading old authors only, and exhaust his entire spleen in scouting new ones : but the lover of the stage cannot amuse himself, in (his solitary fastidiousness,

by sitting to witness a play got up by the departed ghosts of first-rate actors ; or be contented with the perusal of a collection of old play-bills :—he may extol Garrick, but he must go to see Kean ; and, in his own defence, must admire, or at least tolerate, what he sees, or stay away against his will. If, indeed, by any spell or power of necromancy, all the celebrated actors, for the last hundred years, could be made to appear again on the boards of Covent-Garden and Drury Lane, for the last time, in their most brilliant parts, what a rich treat to the town, what a feast for the critics, to go and see Betterton, and Booth, and Wilks, and Sandford, and Nokes, and Leigh, and Penkethman, and Bullock, and Estcourt, and Dogget, and Mrs. Barry, and Mrs. Montfort, and Mrs. Oldfield, and Mrs. Bracegirdle, and Mrs. Cibber, and Cibber himself, the prince of coxcombs, and Macklin, and Quin, and Rich, and Mrs. Clive, and Mrs. Pritchard, and Mrs. Abingdon, and Weston, and Shuter, and Garrick, and all the rest of those who “gladdened life, and whose death eclipsed the gaiety of nations!” We should certainly be there. We should buy a ticket for the season. We should enjoy *our hundred days* again. We should not miss a single night. We would not, for a great deal, be absent from Betterton’s Hamlet or his Brutus, or from Booth’s Cato, as it was first acted to

*...but supports
the best actors have
passed away & now for a
time past have been
seen but actors have
not yet come forward.*

ON ACTORS AND ACTING.

the contending applause of Whigs and Tories. We should be in the first row when Mrs. Barry (who was kept by Lord Rochester, and with whom Otway was in love) played Monimia or Belvidera ; and we suppose we should go to see Mrs. Bracegirdle (with whom all the world was in love) in all her parts. We should then know exactly whether Penkethman's manner of picking a chicken, and Bullock's mode of devouring asparagus, answered to the ingenious account of them in the Tatler ; and whether Dogget was equal to Downton—whether Mrs. Montfort or Mrs. Abingdon was the finest lady—whether Wilks or Cibber was the best Sir Harry Wildair,—whether Macklin was really “ the Jew that Shakespeare drew,” and whether Garrick was, upon the whole, so great an actor as the world would have made him out ! Many people have a strong desire to pry into the secrets of futurity ; for our own parts, we should be satisfied if we had the power to recal the dead, and live the past over again, as often as we pleased ! —Players, after all, have little reason to complain of their hard-earned, short-lived popularity. One thunder of applause from pit, boxes, and gallery, is equal to a whole immortality of posthumous fame ; and when we hear an actor (Liston), whose modesty is equal to his merit, declare that he would like to see a dog wag his tail in approbation, what must he

feel when he sets the whole house in a roar! Besides, Fame, as if their reputation had been entrusted to her alone, has been particularly careful of the renown of her theatrical favourites: she forgets, one by one, and year by year, those who have been great lawyers, great statesmen, and great warriors in their day; but the name of Garrick still survives with the works of Reynolds and of Johnson.

Actors have been accused, as a profession, of being extravagant and dissipated. While they are said to be so, as a piece of common cant, they are likely to continue so. But there is a sentence in Shakspeare which should be stuck as a label in the mouths of our beadle^s and whippers-in of morality: "The web of our life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together: our virtues would be proud if our faults whipped them not: and our vices would despair if they were not cherished by our virtues." With respect to the extravagance of actors, as a traditional character, it is not to be wondered at. They live from hand to mouth: they plunge from want into luxury; they have no means of making money *breed*, and all professions that do not live by turning money into money, or have not a certainty of accumulating it in the end by parsimony, spend it. Uncertain of the future, they make sure of the present moment. This is not unwise. Chilled with poverty, steeped

in contempt, they sometimes pass into the sunshine of fortune, and are lifted to the very pinnacle of public favour ; yet even there they cannot calculate on the continuance of success, but are, “ like the giddy sailor on the mast, ready with every blast to topple down into the fatal bowels of the deep ! ” Besides, if the young enthusiast, who is smitten with the stage, and with the public as a mistress, were naturally a close *hunkie*, he would become or remain a city clerk, instead of turning player. Again, with respect to the habit of convivial indulgence, an actor, to be a good one, must have a great spirit of enjoyment in himself—strong impulses, strong passions, and a strong sense of pleasure : for it is his business to imitate the passions, and to communicate pleasure to others. A man of genius is not a machine. The neglected actor may be excused if he drinks oblivion of his disappointments ; the successful one if he quaffs the applause of the world, and enjoys the friendship of those who are the friends of the favourites of fortune, in draughts of nectar. There is no path so steep as that of fame : no labour so hard as the pursuit of excellence. The intellectual excitement, inseparable from those professions which call forth all our sensibility to pleasure and pain, requires some corresponding physical excitement to support ~~or~~ failure, and not a little to allay the ferment of the

spirits attendant on success. If there is any tendency to dissipation beyond this in the profession of a player, it is owing to the prejudices entertained against them—to that spirit of bigotry which in a neighbouring country would deny actors Christian burial after their death, and to that cant of criticism which, in our own, slurs over their characters, while living, with a half-witted jest. Players are only not so respectable as a profession as they might be, because their profession is not respected as it ought to be.

A London engagement is generally considered by actors as the *ne plus ultra* of their ambition, as "a consummation devoutly to be wished," as the great prize in the lottery of their professional life. But this appears to us, who are not in the secret, to be rather the prose termination of their adventurous career; it is the provincial commencement that is the poetical and truly enviable part of it. After that, they have comparatively little to hope or fear. "The wine of life is drunk, and but the lees remain." In London, they become gentlemen, and the King's servants, but it is the romantic mixture of the hero and the vagabond that constitutes the essence of the player's life. It is the transition from their real to their assumed characters, from the contempt of the world to the applause of the multitude, that gives its

integrity of action.

to the grand with the

zest to the latter, and raises them as much above common humanity at night as in the day-time they are depressed below it. "Hurried from fierce extremes, by contrast made more fierce,"—it is rags and a flock bed which give their splendour to a plume of feathers and a throne. We should suppose that if the most admired actor on the London stage were brought to confession on this point, he would acknowledge that all the applause he had received from "brilliant and overflowing audiences" was nothing to the light-headed intoxication of unlooked-for success in a barn. In town, actors are criticised: in country places, they are wondered at, or hooted at: it is of little consequence which, so that the interval is not too long between. For ourselves, we own that the description of the strolling player in Gil Blas, soaking his dry crusts in the well by the roadside, presents to us a perfect picture of human felicity.

ON MODERN COMEDY.*

THE question which has often been asked, *Why there are so few modern Comedies?* appears in a great measure to answer itself. It is because so many excellent comedies have been written, that there are none such written at present. Comedy naturally wears itself out—destroys the very food on which it lives; and by constantly and successfully exposing the follies and weaknesses of mankind to ridicule, in the end leaves itself nothing worth laughing at. It holds the mirror up to nature; and men, seeing their most striking peculiarities and defects pass in gay review before them, learn either to avoid or conceal them. It is not the criticism which the public taste exercises upon the stage, but the criticism which the stage exercises upon public manners, that is fatal to comedy, by rendering the subject-matter of it tame, correct, and spiritless. We are drilled into a sort of stupid decorum, and forced to wear the same dull uniform of outward appearance; and yet it is asked, why the Comic Muse does not point, as she was wont, at the peculiarities of our gait and gesture,

and exhibit the picturesque contrast of our dress and costume, in all that graceful variety in which she delights. The genuine source of comic writing,

"Where it must live, or have no life at all,"

is undoubtedly to be found in the distinguishing peculiarities of men and manners. Now, this distinction can subsist, so as to be strong, pointed, and general, only while the manners of different classes are formed immediately by their particular circumstances, and the characters of individuals by their natural temperament and situation, without being everlastingly modified and neutralized by intercourse with the world—by knowledge and education. In a certain stage of society, men may be said to vegetate like trees, and to become rooted to the soil in which they grow. They have no idea of any thing beyond themselves and their immediate sphere of action; they are, as it were, circumscribed, and defined by their particular circumstances; they are what their situation makes them, and nothing more. Each is absorbed in his own profession or pursuit, and each in his turn contracts that habitual peculiarity of manners and opinions, which makes him the subject of ridicule to others, and the sport of the Comic Muse. Thus the physician is nothing but a physician, the lawyer is a mere lawyer, the scholar

degenerates into a pedant, the country squire is a different species of being from the fine gentleman, the citizen and the courtier inhabit a different world, and even the affectation of certain characters, in aping the follies or vices of their betters, only serves to shew the immeasurable distance which custom or fortune has placed between them. Hence the early comic writers, taking advantage of this mixed and solid mass of ignorance, folly, pride, and prejudice, made those deep and lasting incisions into it,—have given those sharp and nice touches, that bold relief to their characters,—have opposed them in every variety of contrast and collision, of conscious self-satisfaction and mutual antipathy, with a power which can only find full scope in the same rich and inexhaustible materials. But in proportion as comic genius succeeds in taking off the mask from ignorance and conceit, as it teaches us to

“ See ourselves as others see us,”—

in proportion as we are brought out on the stage together, and our prejudices clash one against the other, our sharp angular points wear off; we are no longer rigid in absurdity, passionate in folly, and we prevent the ridicule directed at our habitual foibles, by laughing at them ourselves.

If it be said, that there is the same fund of ab-

surdity and prejudice in the world as ever—that there are the same unaccountable perversities lurking at the bottom of every breast,—I should answer, be it so; but at least we keep our follies to ourselves as much as possible—we palliate, shuffle, and equivocate with them—they sneak into bye-corners, and do not, like Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims, march along the high road, and form a procession—they do not entrench themselves strongly behind custom and precedent—they are not embodied in professions and ranks in life—they are not organized into a system—they do not openly resort to a standard, but are a sort of straggling nondescripts, that, like *Wart*, "Present no mark to the foeman." As to the gross and palpable absurdities of modern manners, they are too shallow and barefaced, and those who affect, are too little *serious* in them, to make them worth the detection of the Comic Muse. They proceed from an idle, impudent affectation of folly in general, in the dashing *bravura* style, not from an infatuation with any of its characteristic modes. In short, the proper object of ridicule is *egotism*: and a man cannot be a very great egotist, who every day sees himself represented on the stage. We are deficient in comedy, because we are without characters in real life—as we have no historical pictures, because we have no faces proper for them.

It is, indeed, the evident tendency of all literature to generalize and *dissipate* character, by giving men the same artificial education, and the same common stock of ideas ; so that we see all objects from the same point of view, and through the same reflected medium ;—we learn to exist, not in ourselves, but in books ;—all men become alike mere readers—spectators, not actors in the scene, and lose all proper personal identity. The templar, the wit, the man of pleasure, and the man of fashion, the courtier and the citizen, the knight and the squire, the lover and the miser—Lovelace, Lothario, Will. Honeycomb, and Sir Roger de Coverley, Sparkish, and Lord Fop-pington, Western and Tom Jones, my Father, and my uncle Toby, Millamant, and Sir Sampson Legend, Don Quixote and Sancho, Gil Blas, and Guzman d'Alfarache, Count Fathom and Joseph Surface,—have all met, and exchanged common-places on the barren plains of the *haute littérature*—toil slowly on to the Temple of Science, seen a long way off upon a level, and end in one dull compound of politics, criticism, chemistry, and metaphysics !

We cannot expect to reconcile opposite things. If, for example, any of us were to put ourselves into the stage-coach from Salisbury to London, it is more than probable we should not meet with the same number of odd accidents, or ludicrous distresses on

the road, that befel Parson Adams ; but why, if we get into a common vehicle, and submit to the conveniences of modern travelling, should we complain of the want of adventures ? (Modern manners may be compared to a modern stage-coach : our limbs may be a little cramped with the confinement, and we may grow drowsy ; but we arrive safe, without any very amusing or very sad accident, at our journey's end.)

Again, the alterations which have taken place in conversation and dress in the same period, have been by no means favourable to Comedy. The present prevailing style of conversation is not *personal*, but critical and analytical. It consists almost entirely in the discussion of general topics, in dissertations on philosophy or taste : and Congreve would be able to derive no better hints from the conversation of our toilettes or drawing-rooms, for the exquisite raillery or poignant repartee of his dialogues, than from a deliberation of the Royal Society. In the same manner, the extreme simplicity and graceful uniformity of modern dress, however favourable to the arts, has certainly stript Comedy of one of its richest ornaments and most expressive symbols. The sweeping pall and buskin, and nodding plume, were never more serviceable to Tragedy, than the enormous hoops and stiff stays worn by the belles of

former days were to the intrigues of Comedy. They assisted wonderfully in heightening the mysteries of the passion, and adding to the intricacy of the plot. Wycherley and Vanbrugh could not have spared the dresses of Vandyke. These strange fancy-dresses, perverse disguises, and counterfeit shapes, gave an agreeable scope to the imagination. (“That seven-fold fence” was a sort of foil to the lusciousness of the dialogue, and a barrier against the sly encroachments of *double entendre*. The greedy eye and bold hand of indiscretion were repressed, which gave a greater licence to the tongue. The senses were not to be gratified in an instant. Love was entangled in the folds of the swelling handkerchief, and the desires might wander for ever round the circumference of a quilted petticoat, or find a rich lodging in the flowers of a damask stomacher. There was room for years of patient contrivance, for a thousand thoughts, schemes, conjectures, hopes, fears, and wishes. There seemed no end of difficulties and delays; to overcome so many obstacles was the work of ages. A mistress was an angel concealed behind whalebone, flounces, and brocade. What an undertaking to penetrate through the disguise! What an impulse must it give to the blood, what a keenness to the invention, what a volubility to the tongue! “Mr. Smirk, you are a brisk man,” was then the

most significant commendation. But now-a-days—
A woman can be *but undressed*!

The same account might be extended to Tragedy. Aristotle has long since said, that Tragedy purifies the mind by terror and pity; that is, substitutes an artificial and intellectual interest for real passion. Tragedy, like Comedy, must therefore defeat itself; for its patterns must be drawn from the living models within the breast, from feeling or from observation; and the materials of Tragedy cannot be found among a people, who are the habitual spectators of Tragedy, whose interests and passions are not their own, but ideal, remote, sentimental, and abstracted. It is for this reason chiefly, we conceive, that the highest efforts of the Tragic Muse are in general the earliest; where the strong impulses of nature are not lost in the refinement and glosses of art; where the writers themselves, and those whom they saw about them, had “warm hearts of flesh and blood beating in their bosoms, and were not embowelled of their natural entrails, and stuffed with paltry blurred sheets of paper.” Shakspeare, with all his genius, could not have written as he did, if he had lived in the present times. Nature would not have presented itself to him in the same freshness and vigour; he must have seen it through all the refractions of successive dulness, and his powers would have languished in the

dense atmosphere of logic and criticism. "Men's minds," he somewhere says, "are parcel of their fortunes;" and (his age was necessary to him.) It was this which enabled him to grapple at once with nature, and which stamped his character with her image and superscription.

ON DRAMATIC POETRY.*

GODWIN, COLERIDGE, SCOTT, ETC.

THE age we live in is critical, didactic, paradoxical, ✓ romantic, but it is not dramatic. This, if any, is its weak side. When we give it as our opinion, that this is not "the high and palmy state" of the productions of the stage, we would be understood to signify, that there has hardly been a good tragedy or a good comedy written within the last fifty years, that is, since the time of Home's Douglas, and Sheridan's School for Scandal ; and when we speak of a good tragedy or comedy, we mean one that will be thought so fifty years hence. Not that we would have it supposed, that a work, to be worth any thing, must last always : but we think that a play that only runs its one-and-twenty nights, that does not reach beyond the life of an actor, or the fashion of a single generation, may be fairly set down as good for nothing, to any purposes of criticism, or serious admiration. Time seems to have its circle as well as the globe we inhabit ; the loftiest eminences, by degrees, sink beneath the horizon ; the greatest works are

* 1820.

lost sight of in the end, and cannot be restored ; but those that disappear at the first step we take, or are hidden by the first object that intervenes, can, in either case, be of no real magnitude or importance. We have never seen the highest range of mountains in the world ; nor are the longest-lived works intelligible to us (from the difference both of language and manners) at this day : but the name of the Andes, and that of old, blind Homer, serves us on this side of the globe, and at the lag-end of time, to repeat and wonder at ; and that we have ever heard of either is alone sufficient proof of the vastness of the one, and of the sublimity of the other ! Without waiting for the final award, or gradual oblivion of slow-revolving ages, we may be bold to say of our writers for the stage, during the last twenty or thirty years, as Pope is reported to have said of Ben Jonson's, somewhat unadvisedly, "What trash are *their* works, taken altogether !" We would not deny or deprecate merit, wherever we find it, in individuals, or in classes : for instance, we grant that all the pantomimes are good in which Mr. Grimaldi plays the clown ; and that the melodrames have been excellent, when Mr. Farley had a hand in them ; and that the farces could not be damned if Munden showed his face in them ; and that O'Keeffe's could not fail with an audience that had a mind to laugh :

but having mentioned these, and added a few more to our private list (for it might be invidious to specify particularly No Song no Supper, the Prize, Goldfinch, Robert Tyke, or Lubin Log, &c. &c.), we really are at a loss to proceed with the more legitimate and higher productions of the modern drama. Are there not then Mr. Coleridge's Remorse, Mr. Maturin's Bertram, Mr. Milman's Fazio, and many others? There are; but we do not know that they make any difference in the question. The poverty indeed of our present dramatic genius cannot be made appear more fully than by this, that whatever it has to show of *profound*, is of German taste and origin; and that what little it can boast of *elegant*, though light and vain, is taken from *petite* pieces of Parisian mould.

We have been long trying to find out the meaning of all this, and at last we think we have succeeded. The cause of the evil complained of, like the root of so many other grievances and complaints, lies in the French revolution. That event has riveted all eyes, and distracted all hearts; and, like people staring at a comet, in the panic and confusion in which we have been huddled together, we have not had time to laugh at one another's defects, or to condole over one another's misfortunes. We have become a nation of politicians and newsmongers; our inquiries in the streets are no less than after the health of Europe;

and in men's faces we may see strange matters written,—the rise of stocks, the loss of battles, the fall of kingdoms, and the death of kings. The Muse, meanwhile, droops in bye-corners of the mind, and is forced to take up with the refuse of our thoughts. Our attention has been turned, by the current of events, to the general nature of men and things; and we cannot call it heartily back to individual caprices, or headstrong passions, which are the nerves and sinews of Comedy and Tragedy. What is an individual man to a nation? Or what is a nation to an abstract principle? The affairs of the world are spread out before us, as in a map; we sit with the newspaper, and a pair of compasses in our hand, to measure out provinces, and to dispose of thrones; we "look abroad into universality," feel in circles of latitude and longitude, and cannot contract the grasp of our minds to scan with nice scrutiny particular foibles, or to be engrossed by any single suffering. What we gain in extent, we lose in force and depth.

A general and speculative interest absorbs the corroding poison, and takes out the sting of our more circumscribed and fiercer passions. We are become public creatures: "are embowelled of our natural entrails, and stuffed," as Mr. Burke has it in his high-flown phrase, "with paltry blurred sheets of paper about the rights of man," or the rights of legitimacy.

We break our sleep to argue a question ; a piece of news spoils our appetite for dinner. We are not so solicitous after our own success as the success of a cause. Our thoughts, feelings, distresses, are about what no way concerns us, more than it concerns anybody else, like those of the Upholsterer, ridiculed as a new species of character in the Tatler : but we are become a nation of upholsterers. We participate in the general progress of intellect, and the large vicissitudes of human affairs ; but the hugest private sorrow looks dwarfish and puerile. In the sovereignty of our minds, we make mankind our quarry ; and, in the scope of our ambitious thoughts, hunt for prey through the four quarters of the world. In a word, literature and civilization have abstracted man from himself so far, that his existence is no longer dramatic ; and the press has been the ruin of the stage, unless we are greatly deceived.

If a bias to abstraction is evidently, then, the reigning spirit of the age, dramatic poetry must be allowed to be most irreconcileable with this spirit ; it is essentially individual and concrete, both in form and in power. It is the closest imitation of nature ; it has a body of truth ; it is "a counterfeit presentment" of reality ; for it brings forward certain characters to act and speak for themselves, in the most trying and singular circumstances. It is not enough

for them to declaim on certain general topics, however forcibly or learnedly—this is merely oratory, and this any other characters might do as well, in any other circumstances ; nor is it sufficient for the poet to furnish the colours and forms of style and fancy out of his own store, however inexhaustible ; for if he merely makes them express his own feelings, and the idle effusions of his own breast, he had better speak in his own person, without any of those troublesome “interlocutions between Lucius and Caius.” The tragic poet (to be truly such) can only deliver the sentiments of given persons, placed in given circumstances ; and in order to make what so proceeds from their mouths at once proper to them and interesting to the audience, their characters must be powerfully marked : their passions, which are the subject-matter of which they treat, must be worked up to the highest pitch of intensity ; and the circumstances which give force and direction to them must be stamped with the utmost distinctness and vividness in every line. Within the circle of dramatic character and natural passion, each individual is to feel as keenly, as profoundly, as rapidly as possible, but he is not to feel beyond it, for others or for the whole. Each character, on the contrary, must be a kind of centre of repulsion to the rest ; and it is their hostile interests, brought into col-

lision, that must tug at their heart-strings, and call forth every faculty of thought, of speech, and action. They must not be represented like a set of profiles, looking all the same way, nor with their faces turned round to the audience ; but in dire contention with each other ; their words, like their swords, must strike fire from one another—must inflict the wound, and pour in the poison. The poet, to do justice to his undertaking, must not only identify himself with each, but must take part with all by turns, “to relish all as sharply, passioned as they ;”—must feel scorn, pity, love, hate, anger, remorse, revenge, ambition, in their most sudden and fierce extremes,—must not only have these passions rooted in his mind, but must be alive to every circumstance affecting them, to every accident of which advantage can be taken to gratify or exasperate them ; a word must kindle the dormant spark into a flame ; an unforeseen event must overturn his whole being *in conceit*; it is from the excess of passion that he must borrow the activity of his imagination ; he must mould the sound of his verse to its fluctuations and caprices, and build up the whole superstructure of his fable on the deep and strict foundations of nature. But surely it is hardly to be thought that the poet should feel for others in this way, when they have ceased almost to feel for themselves ; when the mind is turned habi-

tually out of itself to general, speculative truth, and possibilities of good, and when, in fact, the processes of the understanding, analytical distinctions, and verbal disputes, have superseded all personal and local attachments and antipathies, and have, in a manner, put a stop to the pulsation of the heart—extenched the fever in the blood—the madness in the brain ;—when we are more in love with a theory than a mistress, and would only crush to atoms those who are of an opposite party to ourselves in taste, philosophy, or polities. Seljuk The folds of self-love, arising out of natural instincts, connections, and circumstances, have not wound themselves exclusively and unconsciously enough round the human mind to furnish the matter of impassioned poetry in real life ; alluch less are we to expect the poet, without observation of its effects on others, or experience of them in himself, to supply the imaginary form out of vague topics, general reflections, far-fetched tropes, affected sentiments, and fine writing. To move the world, he must have a place to fix the levers of invention upon. The poet (let his genius be what it will) can only act by sympathy with the public mind and manners of his age ; but these are, at present, not in sympathy, but in opposition to dramatic poetry. Therefore, we have no dramatic poets. It would be strange indeed (under favour be it spoken) if in the same period of

time that produced the Political Justice or the Edinburgh Review, there should be found such an unfeathered two-legged thing" as a real tragedy poet.

But it may be answered, that the author of the Enquiry concerning Political Justice is himself a writer of romances, and the author of Caleb Williams. We hearken to the suggestion, and will take this and one or two other eminent examples, to show how far we fall short of the goal we aim at. "Ye may wear your *bays* with a difference." Mr. Godwin has written an admirable and almost unrivalled novel (nay, more than one)—he has also written two tragedies, and failed. We can hardly think it would have been possible for him to have failed, but on principle here stated, viz. that it was impossible for him to succeed. His genius is wholly adverse to the stage. As an author, as a novel writer, he may be considered as a philosophical recluse, a closet hermit. He cannot be denied to possess the *constructive* organ, to have originality and invention in an extraordinary degree; but he does not construct according to nature; his invention is not dramatic. He takes a character or a passion, and works it out to the utmost possible extravagance, and palliates, or urges it on by every resource of the understanding, or by every species of plausible sophistry; but in doing this, he may be said to be only spinning a subtle theory, to

or the maintaining a wild paradox, as much as when he such an ~~leads~~ ^{introduces} a philosophical and abstract principle into a ~~edy~~ ^{page} of its ramifications, and builds an entire and exclusive system of feeling and action on a single daring ~~is himself~~ ^{view} of human nature. "He sits in the centre" of Caleb's web, and "enjoys" not "bright day," but a kind of gloomy grandeur. His characters stand alone, as it were created, and self-supported, without communication. "With, or reaction upon, any other (except in the Mr. Godwin instance of Caleb Williams himself) :—the alled no ~~otions~~ ^{tions} are not excited, qualified, or irritated by two circumstances, but moulded by the will of the writer, & it were clay in the hands of the potter. Mr. Godwin's imagination works like the power of steam, with invisible conceivable and incessant expansive force ; but it is ~~re~~ to ~~to~~ in one direction, mechanical and uniform. By ~~e~~ may help, he weaves gigantic figures, and unfolds ~~ter~~ set heroic situations ; but they are like the cloudy pageantry ~~ve~~ organ ^{it} hangs over the edge of day, and the prodigious ~~ordin~~ spring of his brain have neither fellow nor commanding editor in the scene of his imagination. They require ~~a~~ take ^{are} a clear stage to themselves. They do not enter ~~the~~ ultimate lists with other men, nor are actuated by the organs it ordinary wheels, pulleys, and machinery of society ; by ~~ever~~ ^{they} are at issue with themselves, and at war with this, ~~the~~ ^{the} nature of things. Falkland, St. Leon, Mandeville, ~~are~~ ^{are} studies for us to contemplate, not men that

we can sympathise with. They move in an orbit of their own, urged on by restless thought and迷惘的 sentiment, on which the antagonist powers of habit, circumstances, and opinion have no influence whatever. The arguments addressed to them are idle and ineffectual. You might as well argue with a madman, or talk to the winds. But this is not the nature of dramatic writing. Mr. Godwin, to succeed in tragedy, should compose it almost entirely of soliloquies, like the Prometheus of Æschylus; and his dialogues, properly translated, would turn out to be monologues, as we see in the Iron Chest.*

The same, or similar, remarks would apply to Mr. Wordsworth's hankering after the drama. We understand that, like Mr. Godwin, the author of the Lyric Ballads formerly made the attempt, and did not receive encouragement to proceed. We cannot say positively; but we much suspect that the writer would be fond of having all the talk to himself. His moody sensibility would eat into the plot like a cancer, and bespeak both sides of the dialogue for its own share. Mr. Wordsworth (we are satisfied with him,

* Miss Baillie has much of the power and spirit of dramatic writing, and not the less because, as a woman, she has been placed out of the vortex of philosophical and political extravagances.

e in an o ~~remembered~~, as he is) is not a man to go out
ght and m ~~self~~ into the feelings of any one else, much less
owers of the part of a variety of characters. He is not,
e no inf bottom, ready to play the lady, the lover, and
to then n. His poetry is a virtual proscription passed
ll argue the promiscuous nature of the drama. He sees
his is no g but himself in the universe ; or if he leans
o, to suc a kindly feeling to any thing else, he would im-
irely of to the most uninteresting things the fulness of
methew own sentiments, and elevate the most insignificant
transla cters into the foremost rank,—before kings, or
see in es, or lords, or wits,—because they do not inter-
ply to with his own sense of self-importance. He has
the of the bye-play, the varying points of view, the
We ~~magnanimity~~ magnanimity of dramatic fiction. He
or of its the opening of the leaves of a daisy, or the
and the name of a hedge (not of a garden) rose, matters
e car consequence enough for him to notice them ; but
e wh thinks the “daily intercourse of all this unin-
-visible world,” its cares, its crimes, its noise, love,
and ambition, (what else ?) mere vanity and vexation
of spirit, with which a great poet cannot condescend
to disturb the bright, serene, and solemn current of
thoughts. This lofty indifference and contempt
of his *dramatis personæ* would not be the most likely
means to make them interesting to the audience. We
find Mr. Wordsworth's poetical egotism would pre-

vent his writing a tragedy. (Yet we have above made the dissipation and rarefaction of this spirit in society, the bar to dramatic excellence.) Egotism is of different sorts ; and he would not compliment the literary and artificial state of manners so much, as to suppose it quite free from this principle. But it is not all. At present to imagination or passion. It is sordid, servile, inert, a compound of dulness, vanity, and interest. That which is the source of dramatic excellence is like a mountain spring, full of life and impetuosity, sparkling with light, thundering down precipices, winding along narrow defiles ; or

Like a wild overflow, that sweeps before him
A golden stack, and with it shakes down bridges,
Cracks the strong hearts of pines, whose cable roots
Held out a thousand storms, a thousand thunders,
And so, made mightier, takes whole villages
Upon his back, and, in that heat of pride,
Charges strong towns, towers, castles, palaces,
And lays them desolate.

The other sort is a stagnant, gilded puddle. Mr. Wordsworth has measured it from side to side. “ ‘Tis three feet long and two feet wide.”—Lord Byron’s patrician haughtiness and monastic seclusion are, we think, no less hostile than the levelling spirit of Mr. Wordsworth’s Muse to the endless gradations, variety, and complicated ideas or *mixed*

modes of this sort of composition. Yet we have read *Manfred.*

But what shall we say of Mr. Coleridge, who is the author not only of a successful but a meritorious tragedy? We may say of him what he has said of Mr. Maturin, that he is of the transcendental German school. He is a florid poet, and an ingenious metaphysician, who mistakes scholastic speculations for the intricate windings of the passions, and assigns possible reasons instead of actual motives for the excesses of his characters. He gives us studied special pleadings for involuntary bursts of feeling, and the needless strain of tinkling sentiments for the point-blank language of nature. His *Remorse* is a spurious tragedy. Take the following passage, and then ask, whether the charge of sophistry and paradox, and dangerous morality, to startle the audience, in lieu of more legitimate methods of exciting their sympathy, which he brings against the author of *Bertram*, may not be retorted on his own head? *Ordonio* is made to defend the project of murdering his brother by such arguments as the following:—

What? if one reptile sting another reptile,
Where is the crime? The goodly face of nature
Hath one disfeaturing stain the less upon it.
Are we not all predestined Transiency,
And cold Dishonour? Grant it, that this hand

*Had given a morsel to the hungry worms
Somewhat too early—where's the crime of this?
That this must needs bring on the idiotcy
Of moist-eyed Penitence—'tis like a dream !
Say, I had lay'd a body in the sun !
Well ! in a month there swarm forth from the corse
A thousand, nay, ten thousand sentient beings
In place of that one man. Say, I had *killed* him !
Yet who shall tell me that each one and all
Of these ten thousand lives is not as happy
As that one life, which, being push'd aside,
Made room for these unnumber'd !*

This is a way in which no one ever justified a murder to his own mind. No one will suspect Mr. Southey of writing a tragedy, nor Mr. Moore either. His Muse is light. Walter Scott excels in the grotesque and the romantic. He gives us that which has been preserved of ancient manners and customs, and barbarous times and characters, and which strikes and staggers the mind the more, by the contrast it affords to the present artificial and effeminate state of society. But we do not know that he could write a tragedy ; what he has engrafted of his own in this way upon the actual stock and floating materials of history is, we think, inferior to the general texture of his work. See, for instance, the conclusion of the Black Dwarf, where the situation of the parties is as dramatic as possible, and the effect is none at all. It is not a sound inference, that, because parts of a novel are

dramatic, the author could write a play. The novelist is dramatic only where he can, and where he pleases ; the other must be so. The first is a *ride* and *tye* business, like a gentleman leading his horse, or walking by the side of a gig down a hill.

ON PLAY-GOING AND ON SOME OF OUR OLD ACTORS.

THERE is less pedantry and affectation (though not less party-feeling and personal prejudice) in judging of the stage than of most other subjects ; and we feel a sort of theoretical as well as instinctive predilection for the faces of play-going people, as among the most sociable, gossiping, good-natured, and humane members of society. In this point of view, as well as in others, the stage is a test and school of humanity. We do not much like any persons who do not like plays ; and for this reason, that we imagine they cannot much like themselves or any one else. The really humane man (except in cases of unaccountable prejudices, which we do not think the most likely means to increase or preserve the natural amiableness of his disposition) is prone to the study of humanity. *Omnes boni et liberales HUMANITATI semper favemus.* He likes to see it brought home from the universality of precepts and general terms to the reality of persons, of tones, and actions ; and to have it raised from the grossness

and familiarity of sense, to the lofty but striking platform of the imagination. He likes to see the face of man with the veil of time torn from it, and to feel the pulse of nature beating in all times and places alike. The smile of good-humoured surprise at folly, the tear of pity at misfortune, do not misbecome the face of man or woman. It is something delightful and instructive to have seen Coriolanus or King John in the habiliments of Mr. Kemble, to have shaken hands almost with Othello in the person of Mr. Kean, to have cowered before the spirit of Lady Macbeth in the glance of Mrs. Siddons. The stage at once gives a body to our thoughts, and refinement and expansion to our sensible impressions. It has not the pride and remoteness of abstract science; it has not the petty egotism of vulgar life. It is particularly wanted in great cities (where it of course flourishes most) to take off from the dissatisfaction and *ennui* that creep over our own pursuits from the indifference or contempt thrown upon them by others; and at the same time to reconcile our numberless discordant, incommensurable feelings and interests together, by giving us an immediate and common topic to engage our attention, and (to rally us round the standard of our common humanity,) We never hate a face that we have seen in the pit; and Liston's laugh would be a cordial to wash down

the oldest animosity of the most inveterate pit-critics.

The only drawback on the felicity and triumphant self-complacency of a play-goer's life, arises from the shortness of life itself. We miss the favourites, not of another age, but of our own—the idols of our youthful enthusiasm ; and we cannot replace them by others. It does not shew that *these* are worse, because they are different from *those* : though they had been better, they would not have been so good to us. It is the penalty of our nature, from Adam downwards : so Milton makes our first ancestor exclaim,—

“ Should God create
Another Eve, and I another rib afford,
Yet loss of thee would never from my heart.”

We offer our best affections, our highest aspirations after the good and beautiful, on the altar of youth : it is well if, in our after-age, we can sometimes rekindle the almost extinguished flame, and inhale its dying fragrance like the breath of incense, of sweet-smelling flowers and gums, to detain the spirit of life, the ethereal guest, a little longer in its frail abode—to cheer and soothe it with the pleasures of memory, not with those of hope. While we can do this, life is worth living for : when we can do it no longer, its spring will soon go down, and we had

better not be!—Who shall give us Mrs. Siddons again, but in a waking dream, a beatific vision of past years, crowned with other hopes and other feelings, whose pomp is also faded, and their glory and their power gone! Who shall in our time (or can
ever to the eye of fancy) fill the stage, like her, with the dignity of their persons, and the emanations of their minds? Or who shall sit majestic on the throne of tragedy—a Goddess, a prophetess and a Muse—from which the lightning of her eye flashed o'er the ~~mind~~ mind, startling its inmost thoughts—and the thunder of her voice circled through the labouring breast, rousing deep and scarce-known feelings from their slumber? Who shall stalk over the stage of horrors, its presiding genius, or “play the hostess,” at the banqueting scene of murder? Who shall walk in sleepless ecstasy of soul, and haunt the mind’s eye ever after with the dread pageantry of suffering and of guilt? Who shall make tragedy once more stand with its feet upon the earth, and with its head raised above the skies, weeping tears and blood? That loss is not to be repaired. While the stage lasts, there will never be another Mrs. Siddons! Tragedy seemed to set with her; and the rest are but blazing comets or fiery exhalations. It is pride and happiness enough for us to have lived at the same time with her, and one person more! But enough on this

subject. Those feelings that we are most anxious to do justice to, are those to which it is impossible we ever should !

To turn to something less serious. We have not the same pomp of tragedy nor the same gentility, variety, and correctness in comedy. There was the gay, fluttering, hair-brained Lewis; he that was called "Gentleman Lewis,"—all life, and fashion, and volubility, and whim; the greatest comic *mannerist* that perhaps ever lived; whose head seemed to be in his heels, and his wit at his finger's ends: who never let the stage stand still, and made your heart light and your head giddy with his infinite vivacity, and bustle, and hey-day animal spirits. We wonder how Death ever caught him in his mad, whirling career, or ever fixed his volatile spirit in a dull *caput mortuum* of dust and ashes? Nobody could break open a door, or jump over a table, or scale a ladder, or twirl a cocked hat, or dangle a cane, or play a jockey-nobleman, or a nobleman's jockey, like him. He was at Covent Garden. With him was Quick, who made an excellent self-important, busy, strutting, money-getting citizen; or crusty old guardian, in a brown-suit and a bob wig. There was also Munden, who was as good an actor then as he is now; and Fawcett, who was at that time a much better one than he is at present; for he, of late, seems

to slur over his parts, wishes to merge the actor in the manager, and is grown serious before retiring from the stage. But a few years back (when he ran the race of popularity with Jack Bannister), nobody could give the *view holloa* of a fox-hunting country squire like him ; and he sung *AMO AMAS*, as Lingo in the Agreeable Surprise, in a style of pathos to melt the heart of the young apprentices in the two-shilling gallery. But he appears to have grown averse to his profession, and indifferent to the applause he might acquire for himself, and to the pleasures he used to give to others. In turbulent and pragmatical characters, and in all that cast of parts which may be called the *slang* language of comedy, he hardly had his equal. Perhaps he might consider this walk of his art as beneath his ambition ; but, in our judgment, whatever a man can do best, is worth his doing. At the same house was little Simmons, who remained there till lately, like a veteran at his post, till he fell down a flight of steps and broke his neck, without any one's seeming to know or care about the matter. Though one of those "who had gladdened life," his death by no means "eclipsed the gaiety of nations." The public are not grateful. They make an effort of generosity, collect all their reluctant admiration into a heap, and offer it up with servile ostentation at the shrine of some great name,

which they think reflects back its lustre on the worshippers. Or, like fashionable creditors, they pay their debts of honour for the *eclat* of the thing, and neglect the claims of humbler but sterling merit, such as was that of Simmons, one of the most correct, pointed, *naïve*, and whimsical comic actors, we have for a long time had, or are likely to have again. He was not a buffoon, but a real actor. He did not play *himself*, nor play tricks, but played the part the author had assigned him. This was the great merit of the good old style of acting. He fitted into it like a brilliant into the setting of a ring, or as the ring fits the finger. We shall look for him often in Filch, in which his appearance was a continual *double entendre*, with one eye leering at his neighbour's pockets, and the other turned to the gallows—in the spangled Beau Mordecai, in Moses, in which he had all the precision, the pragmaticalness, and impenetrable secresy of the Jew money-lender; and in my Lord Sands, where he had all the stage to himself, and seemed to fill it by the singular insignificance of his person, and the infinite airs he gave himself. We shall look for him in these and many other parts, but in vain, or for any one equal to him.

At the other house, there was King, whose acting left a taste on the palate, sharp and sweet like a quince; with an old, hard, rough, withered face, like

a John-apple, puckered up into a thousand wrinkles ; with shrewd hints and tart replies ; “with nods and becks, and wreathed smiles ;” who was the real amorous, wheedling, or hasty, choleric, peremptory old gentleman in Sir Peter Teazle and Sir Anthony Absolute ; and the true, that is, the pretended, clown in Touchstone, with wit sprouting from his head like a pair of ass’s ears, and folly perched on his cap like the horned owl. There was Parsons too, whom we just remember, like a worn-out “suit of office,” in Elbow ; and Dodd in Acres, who had the most extraordinary way of hitching in a meaning, or subsiding into blank folly with the best grace in nature ; and whose courage seemed literally to ooze out of his fingers in the preparations for the duel. There was Suett, the delightful old croaker, the everlasting Dicky Gossip of the stage ; and, with him, Jack Bannister, whose gaiety, good humour, cordial feeling, and natural spirits, shone through his characters, and lighted them up like a transparency. Bannister did not go out of himself to take possession of his part, but put it on over his ordinary dress, like a *surtout*, snug, warm, and comfortable. He let his personal character appear through ; and it was one great charm of his acting. In Lenitive, in the Prize, when the beau is ingrafted on the apothecary, he came out of his shell like the aurelia out of the

grub ; and surely never lighted on the stage, which he hardly seemed to touch, a more delightful vision —gilding and cheering the motley sphere he just began to move in—shining like a gilded pill, fluttering like a piece of gold-leaf, gaudy as a butterfly, loud as a grasshopper, full of life, and laughter, and joy. His Scrub, in which he spouts a torrent of home-brewed ale against the ceiling, in a sudden fit of laughter at the wagggeries of his brother Martin ; —his Son-in-law ; his part in the Grandmother ; his Autolycus ; his Colonel Feignwell ; and his Walter, in the Children in the Wood—were all admirable. Most of his characters were exactly fitted for him—for his good-humoured smile, his buoyant activity, his kind heart, and his honest face : and no one else could do them so well, because no one else could play Jack Bannister. He was, some time since, seen casting a wistful eye at Drury-lane theatre, and no doubt thinking of past times : others who also cast a wistful eye at it, do not forget him when they think of old and happy times ! There were Bob and Jack Palmer, the Brass and Dick of the Confederacy ; the one the pattern of an elder, the other of a younger brother. There was Wewitzer, the trustiest of Swiss valets, and the most “secret Tattle” of the stage. There was, and there still is, Irish Johnstone, with his supple knees, his hat twisted round in his

hand, his good-humoured laugh, his arched eyebrows, his insinuating leer, and his lubricated *brogue*, curling round the ear like a well oiled mustachio. These were all the men. Then there was Miss Farren, with her fine-lady airs and graces, with that elegant turn of her head, and motion of her fan, and tripping of her tongue ; and Miss Pope, the very picture of a Duenna, a maiden lady, or an antiquated dowager—the latter spring of beauty, the second childhood of vanity, more quaint, fantastic, and old-fashioned, more pert, frothy, and light-headed than any thing that can be imagined ; embalmed in the follies, preserved in the spirit of affection of the last age :—and then add to these, Mrs. Jordan, the child of nature, whose voice was a cordial to the heart, because it came from it, rich, full, like the luscious juice of the rich grape ; to hear whose laugh was to drink nectar ; whose smile “made a sunshine,” not “in the shady place,” but amidst dazzling lights and in glad theatres :—who “talked far above singing,” and whose singing was like the twang of Cupid’s bow. Her person was large, soft, and generous like her soul. It has been attempted to compare Miss Kelly to her. There is no comparison. Miss Kelly is a shrewd, clever, arch, lively girl ; tingles all over with suppressed sensibility ; licks her lips at mischief, bites her words in two, or

lets a sly meaning out of the corners of her eyes ; is fidgetty with curiosity, or unable to stand still for spite :—she is always uneasy and always interesting ; but Mrs. Jordan was all exuberance and grace, “ her bounty was as boundless as the sea ; her love as deep.” It was her capacity for enjoyment, and the contrast she presented to every thing sharp, angular, and peevish, that communicated the same genial heartfelt satisfaction to the spectator. Her Nell, for instance, was right royal like her liquor, and wrapped up in measureless content with lambs’ wool. Miss Kelly is a dexterous knowing chambermaid : Mrs. Jordan had nothing dexterous or knowing about her. She was Cleopatra turned into an oyster-wench, without knowing that she was Cleopatra, or caring that she was an oyster-wench. An oyster-wench, such as she was, would have been equal to a Cleopatra ; and an Antony would not have deserted her for the empire of the world !

From the favourite actors of a few years back, we turn to those of the present day : and we shall speak of them not with grudging or stinted praise.

The first of these in tragedy is Mr. Kean. To show that we do not conceive that tragedy regularly declines in every successive generation, we shall say, that we do not think there has been in our remembrance any tragic performer (with the exception of Mrs. Siddons) equal to Mr. Kean. Nor, except in

voice and person, and the conscious ease and dignity naturally resulting from those advantages, do we know that even Mrs. Siddons was greater. In truth of nature and force of passion, in discrimination and originality, we see no inferiority to any one on the part of Mr. Kean; but there is an insignificance of figure, and a hoarseness of voice, that necessarily vulgarize, or diminish our idea of the characters he plays: and perhaps to this may be added, a want of a certain correspondent elevation and magnitude of thought, of which Mrs. Siddons's noble form seemed to be only the natural mould and receptacle. Her nature seemed always above the circumstances with which she had to struggle: her soul to be greater than the passion labouring in her breast. Grandeur was the cradle in which her genius was rocked: for her to be, was to be sublime! She did the greatest things with child-like ease: her powers seemed never tasked to the utmost, and always as if she had inexhaustible resources still in reserve. The least word she uttered seemed to float to the end of the stage: the least motion of her hand seemed to command awe and obedience. Mr. Kean is all effort, all violence, all extreme passion: he is possessed with a fury, a demon that leaves him no repose, no time for thought, or room for imagination. He perhaps screws himself up to as intense a degree of feeling

~~son of Kean & Siddons.~~
is power lies in whom she leaves for
play of imagination. see horse in Pope.

as Mrs. Siddons, strikes home with as sure and as hard a blow as she did, but he does this by straining every nerve, and winding up every faculty to this single point alone: and as he does it by an effort himself, the spectator follows him by an effort also. Our sympathy in a manner ceases with the actual impression, and does not leave the same grand and permanent image of itself behind. The Othello furnishes almost the only exception to these remarks. The solemn and beautiful manner in which he pronounces the farewell soliloquy is worth all gladiatorialship and pantomime in the world. His Sir Giles is his most equal and energetic character: but it is too equal, too energetic from the beginning to the end. There is no reason that he should have the same eagerness, the same *impetus* at the commencement as at the close of his career: he should not have the fierceness of the wild beast till he is goaded to madness by the hunters. Sir Giles Mompesson (supposed to be the original character), we dare say, took things more quietly, and only grew desperate with his fortunes. Cooke played the general casting of the character better in this respect, but without the same fine breaks and turns of passion. Cooke indeed, compared with Kean, had only the *slang* and *bravado* of tragedy. Neither can we think Mr. Kemble equal to him, with all his study, his grace, and classic dignity of form. He was the statue of

task for distinguishing
feature in each

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perfect tragedy, not the living soul. Mrs. Siddons combined the advantage of form and other organic requisites with nature and passion : Mr. Kemble has the external requisites (at least of face and figure) without the internal workings of the soul : Mr. Kean has the last without the first, and, if we must make our election between the two, we think the *vis tragica* must take precedence of every thing else. Mr. Kean, in a word, appears to us a test, an *experimentum crucis*, to shew the triumph of genius over physical defects, of nature over art, of passion over affectation, and of originality over common-place monotony.— Next to Mr. Kean, the greatest tragic performer now on the stage, is undoubtedly Miss O'Neil. She cannot take rank by the side of her great predecessor, but neither can any other actress be at all compared with her. If we had not seen Mrs. Siddons, we should not certainly have been able to conceive any thing finer than some of her characters, such as Belvidera, Isabella in the Fatal Marriage, Mrs. Beverly, and Mrs. Haller, which (as she at first played them), in tenderness of sensibility, and the simple force of passion, could not be surpassed. She has, however, of late, carried the expression of mental agony and distress to a degree of physical horror that is painful to behold, and which is particularly repulsive in a person of her delicacy of frame and truly feminine appearance.—Mrs. Bunn is a beautiful and interest-

ing actress in the sentimental drama; and in the part of Queen Elizabeth, in Schiller's Tragedy of Mary Stuart, which she played lately, gave, in the agitation of her form, the distracted thoughts painted in her looks, and the deep but fine and mellow tones of her voice, earnest of higher excellence than she has yet displayed. Her voice is one of the finest on the stage. It resembles the deep murmur of a hive of bees in spring-tide, and the words drop like honey from her lips.—Mr. Macready is, in our opinion, a truly spirited and impassioned declaimer, with a noble voice, and great fervour of manner; but, we apprehend, his *forte* is rather in giving a loose to the tide of enthusiastic feeling or sentiment, than in embodying individual character, or discriminating the diversity of the passions. There is a gaiety and tip-toe elevation in his personal deportment which Mr. Kean has not, but in other more essential points there is no room for competition. Of his Coriolanus and Richard, we may have to speak in detail hereafter.

We shall conclude this introductory sketch with a few words on the comic actors. Emery at Covent Garden might be said to be the best *provincial* actor on the London boards. In his line of rustic characters he is a perfect actor. He would be a bold critic who should undertake to show that in his own walk

Emery ever did any thing wrong. His Hodge is an absolute reality ; and his Lockitt is as sullen, as gloomy, and impenetrable as the prison walls of which he is the keeper. His Robert Tyke is the sublime of tragedy in low life.—Mr. Liston has more comic humour, more power of face, and a more genial and happy vein of folly, than any other actor we remember. His farce is not caricature : his drollery oozes out of his features, and trickles down his face : his voice is a pitch-pipe for laughter. He does some characters but indifferently, others respectably ; but when he *puts himself whole* into a jest, it is unrivalled.—Munden with all his merit, his whim, his imagination, and with his broad effects, is a caricaturist in the comparison. He distorts his features to the utmost stretch of grimace, and trolls his voice about with his tongue in the most extraordinary manner, but he does all this with an evident view to the audience : whereas Liston's style of acting is the unconscious and involuntary ; he indulges his own risibility or absurd humours to please himself, and the odd noises he makes come from him as naturally as the bleating of a sheep.—Elliston is an actor of great merit, and of a very agreeable class : there is a joyousness in his look, his voice, and manner ; he treads the stage as if it was his “best-found and latest as well as earliest choice ;” writes himself co-

median in any book, warrant, or acquittance ; hits the town between wind and water, between farce and tragedy ; touches the string of a mock heroic sentiment with due pathos and vivacity ; and makes the best strolling gentleman, or needy poet, on the stage. His Rover is excellent : so is his Duke in the Honeymoon ; and in Matrimony he is best of all.—Dowton is a genuine and excellent comedian ; and, in speaking of his Major Sturgeon, we cannot pass over, in disdainful silence, Russell's Jerry Sneak, and Mrs. Harlowe's Miss Molly Jollop. Oxberry is an actor of a strong rather than of a pleasant comic vein (his Mawworm is particularly emphatical). Harley pleases others, for he seems pleased himself ; and little Knight, in the simplicity and good nature of the country lad, is inimitable.

MINOR THEATRES—STROLLING PLAYERS.*

THIS is a subject on which we shall treat with satisfaction to ourselves, and, we hope, to the edification of the reader. Indeed, we are not a little vain of the article we propose to write on this occasion ; and we feel the pen in our hands flutter its feathers with more than usual specific levity, at the thought of the idle, careless career before it. No Theatre-Royal oppresses the imagination, and entombs it in a mausoleum of massy pride ; no manager's pompous pretensions choke up the lively current of our blood ; no long-announced performance, big with expectation, comes to nothing, and yet compels us gravely to record its failure, and compose its epitaph. We have here “ample scope and verge enough ;” we pick and choose as we will, light where we please, and stay no longer than we have a mind—saying “this I like, that I loath, as one picks pears :”—hover over the Surrey theatre ; or snatch a grace be-

yond the reach of art from the Miss Dennett's at the Adelphi; or take a peep (like the Devil upon Two Sticks) at Mr. Booth at the Coburg—and one peep is sufficient:—Or stretch our legs and strain our fancies (as a pure voluntary exercise of dramatic faith and charity) as far as Mr. Rae and the East London, where Mrs. Gould (late Miss Burrell) makes fine work with Don Giovanni and the Furies! We are not, in this case, to be “constrained by mastery.”—Escaped from under the more immediate inspection of the Lord Chamberlain's eye, fastidious objections, formal method, regular details, strict moral censure, cannot be expected at our hands: our “speculative and officed instruments” may be well laid aside for a time. At sight of the purlieus of taste, and suburbs of the drama, criticism “clappeth his wings, and straightway he is gone!” In short, we feel it as our bounden duty to strike a truce with gravity, and give full play to fancy; and, in entering on this part of our subject, to let our thoughts wander over it, and sport and trifle with it at pleasure, like the butterfly of whom Spenser largely and loftily sings in his *Muiopotmos*:—

There he arriving, round about doth fly
From bed to bed, from one to other border,
And takes survey, with curious busy eye,
Of every flower and herb there set in order;

Now this, now that he tasteth tenderly,
Yet none of them he rudely doth disorder,
Nor with his feet their silken leaves deface,
But pastures on the pleasures of each place.

What more felicity can fall to creature
Than to enjoy Delight with Liberty,
And to be lord of all the works of Nature,
To reign in th' air from earth to highest sky ;
To feed on flowers, and weeds of glorious feature,
To take whatever thing doth please the eye ?
Who rests not pleased with such happiness,
Well worthy he to taste of wretchedness !

If we could but once realise this idea of a butterfly critic, extracting sweets from flowers, and turning gall to honey, we might well hope to soar above the Grub-street race, and confound, by the novelty of our appearance, and the gaiety of our flight, the idle conjectures of ignorant or malicious pretenders in entomology !

Besides, having once got out of the vortex of prejudice and fashion that surrounds our large Winter Theatres, what is there to hinder us (or what shall) from dropping down from the verge of the metropolis into the haunts of the provincial drama ;—from taking coach to Bath or Brighton, or visiting the Land's-End, or giving an account of Botany-bay theatricals, or the establishment of a new theatre at Venezuela ? One reason that makes the Minor Theatres interesting

is, that they are the connecting link that lets us down, by an easy transition, from the highest pomp and proudest display of the Thespian art, to its first rudiments and helpless infancy.—With conscious happy retrospect, they lead the eye back, along the *vista* of the imagination, to the village barn, or travelling booth, or old-fashioned town-hall, or more genteel assembly-room, in which Momus first unmasked to us his fairy revels, and introduced us, for the first time in our lives, to that strange anomaly in existence, that fanciful reality, that gay waking dream, *a company of strolling players!* Sit still, draw close together, hold in your breath—not a word, not a whisper—the laugh is ready to start away, “like greyhound on the slip,” the big tear of wonder and expectation is ready to steal down “the full eyes and fair cheeks of childhood,” almost before the time. Only another moment, and amidst blazing tapers, and the dancing sounds of music, and light throbbing hearts, and eager looks, the curtain rises, and the picture of the world appears before us in all its glory and in all its freshness. Life throws its gaudy shadow across the stage; Hope shakes his many-coloured wings, “embalmed with odours;” Joy claps his hands, and laughs in a hundred happy faces. Oh, childish fancy, what a mighty empire is thine! what endless creations thou buildest out of

nothing ; what “a wide O” indeed, thou choosest to act thy thoughts and unrivalled feats upon ! Thou art better than the gilt trophy that decks the funeral pall of kings ; thou art brighter than the costly mace that precedes them on their coronation-day. Thy fearfulllest visions are enviable happiness ; thy wildest fictions are the solidest truths. Thou art the only reality. All other possessions mock our idle grasp : but thou performest by promising ; thy smile is fruition ; thy blandishments are all that we can fairly call our own ; thou art the balm of life, the heaven of childhood, the poet’s idol, and the player’s pride ! The world is but thy painting ; and the stage is thine enchanted mirror.—When it first displays its shining surface to our view, how glad, how surprised are we ! We have no thought of any deception in the scene, no wish but to realise it ourselves with inconsiderate haste and fond impatience. We say to the air-drawn gorgeous phantom, “Come, let me clutch thee !” A new sense comes upon us, the scales fall off our eyes, and the scenes of life start out in endless quick succession, crowded with men and women-actors, such as we see before us—comparable to “those gay creatures of the element, that live in the rainbow, and play i’ th’ plighted clouds !” Happy are we who look on and admire ; and happy, we think, must they be who are so looked at and admired ; and

sometimes we begin to feel uneasy till we can ourselves mingle in the gay, busy, talking, fluttering, powdered, painted, perfumed, peruked, quaintly accoutred throng of coxcombs and coquettes,—of tragedy heroes or heroines,—in good earnest; or turn stage-players and represent them in jest, with all the impertinent and consequential airs of the originals!

It is no insignificant epoch in one's life the first time that odd-looking thing, a play-bill, is left at our door in a little market town in the country (say Wem, in Shropshire). The manager, somewhat fatter and more erect, "as manager beseems," than the rest of his company, with more of the man of business, and not less of the coxcomb, in his strat and manner, knocks at the door with the end of a walking cane (his badge of office!), and a bundle of papers under his arm; presents one of them, printed in large capitals, with a respectful bow and a familiar shrug; hopes to give satisfaction in the town; hints at the liberal encouragement they received at the last place they stopped at; had every possible facility afforded by the magistrates; supped one evening with the Rev. Mr. Jenkins, a dissenting clergyman, and really a very well-informed, agreeable, sensible man, full of anecdote—no illiberal prejudices against the profession:—then talks of the strength of his

company, with a careless mention of his own favourite line—his benefit fixed for an early day, but would do himself the honour to leave further particulars at a future opportunity—speaks of the stage as an elegant amusement, that most agreeably enlivens a spare evening or two in the week, and, under proper management (to which he himself paid the most assiduous attention), might be made of the greatest assistance to the cause of virtue and humanity—had seen Mr. Garrick act the last night but one before his retiring from the stage—had himself had offers from the London boards, and indeed could not say he had given up all thoughts of one day surprising them—as it was, had no reason to repine—Mrs. F—— tolerably advanced in life—his eldest son a prodigious turn for the higher walks of tragedy—had said perhaps too much of himself—had given universal satisfaction—hoped that the young gentleman and lady, at least, would attend on the following evening, when the West-Indian would be performed at the market-hall, with the farce of No Song No Supper—and so having played his part, withdraws in the full persuasion of having made a favourable impression, and of meeting with every encouragement the place affords! Thus he passes from house to house, and goes through the routine of topic after topic, with that sort of modest assur-

ance which is indispensable in the manager of a country theatre. This fellow, who floats over the troubles of life as the froth above the idle wave, with all his little expedients and disappointments, with pawned paste-buckles, mortgaged scenery, empty exchequer, and rebellious orchestra, is not of all men the most miserable :—he is little less happy than a king, though not much better off than a beggar. He has little to think of, much to do, more to say ; and is accompanied, in his incessant daily round of trifling occupations, with a never-failing sense of authority and self-importance, the one thing needful (above all others) to the heart of man. This, however, is their man of business in the company ; he is a sort of fixture in their little state ; like Nebuchadnezzar's image, but half of earth and half of finer metal : he is not “of imagination all compact :” he is not, like the rest of his aspiring crew, a feeder upon air, a drinker of applause, tricked out in vanity and in nothing else ; he is not quite mad, nor quite happy. The whining Romeo, who goes supperless to bed, and on his pallet of straw dreams of a crown of laurel, of waving handkerchiefs, of bright eyes, and billet-doux breathing boundless love : the ranting Richard, whose infuriate execrations are drowned in the shouts of the all-ruling pit ; he who, without a coat to his back, or a groat in his purse,

snatches at Cato's robe, and binds the diadem of Cæsar on his brow ;—these are the men that Fancy has chosen for herself, and placed above the reach of fortune, and almost of fate. They take no thought for the morrow. What is it to them what they shall eat, or what they shall drink, or how they shall be clothed ? “Their mind to them a kingdom is.”— It is not a poor ten shillings a week, their share in the profits of the theatre, with which they have to pay for bed, board, and lodging, that bounds their wealth. They share (and not unequally) in all the wealth, the pomp, and pleasures of the world. They wield sceptres, conquer kingdoms, court princesses, are clothed in purple, and fare sumptuously every night. They taste, in imagination, “of all earth’s V’ bliss, both living and loving :” whatever has been most the admiration or most the envy of mankind, they, for a moment, in their own eyes, and in the eyes of others, become. (The poet fancies others to be this or that : the player fancies himself to be all that the poet but describes. A little rouge makes him a lover, a plume of feathers a hero, a brazen crown an emperor. Where will you buy rank, office, supreme delights, so cheap as at his shop of fancy ? Is it nothing to dream whenever we please, and *seem* whatever we desire ? Is real greatness, is real prosperity, more than what it *seems* ? Where shall we

find, or where shall the votary of the stage find, Fortunatus's Wishing Cap, but in the wardrobe which we laugh at; or borrow the philosopher's stone, but from the *property-man* of the theatre? He has discovered the true Elixir of Life, which is freedom from care: he quaffs the pure *aurum potabile*, which is popular applause. He who is smit with the love of this *ideal* existence, cannot be weaned from it. Hoot him from the stage, and he will stay to sweep the lobbies or shift the scenes. Offer him twice the salary to go into a counting-house or stand behind a counter, and he will return to poverty, steeped in contempt, but eked out with fancy, at the end of a week. Make a laughing-stock of an actress, lower her salary, tell her she is too tall, awkward, stupid, and ugly; try to get rid of her all you can—she will remain, only to hear herself courted, to listen to the echo of her borrowed name, to live but one short minute in the lap of vanity and tinsel shew. Will you give a man an additional ten shillings a week, and ask him to resign the fancied wealth of the world, which he “by his so potent art” can conjure up, and glad his eyes, and fill his heart with it? When a little change of dress, and the muttering a few talismanic words, make all the difference between the vagabond and the hero, what signifies the interval so easily passed? Would you not yourself consent

to be alternately a beggar and a king, but that you have not the secret skill to be so? The player has that "happy alchemy of mind :"—why then would you reduce him to an equality with yourself?—The moral of this reasoning is known and felt, though it may be gainsayed. Wherever the players come, they send a welcome before them, and leave an air in the place behind them.* They shed a light upon the day, that does not very soon pass off. See how they glitter along the street, wandering, not where business but the bent of pleasure takes them, like mealy-coated butterflies, or insects flitting in the sun. They seem another, happier, idler race of mortals, prolonging the carelessness of childhood to old age, floating down the stream of life, or wafted by the wanton breeze to their final place of rest. We remember one (we must make the reader acquainted with him) who once overtook us loitering by "Severn's sedgy side," on a fine May morning, with a score of play-bills streaming from his pockets, for the use of the neighbouring villages, and a music-score in his hand, which he sung blithe and clear, advancing with light step and a loud voice! With a sprightly *bon jour*, he passed on, carolling to the echo of the babbling

* So the old song joyously celebrates their arrival ;—
"The beggars are coming to town,
Some in rags, and some in jags, and some in velvet gown."

stream, brisk as a bird, gay as a mote, swift as an arrow from a twanging bow, heart-whole, and with shining face that shot back the sun's broad rays!—What is become of this favourite of mirth and song? Has care touched him? Has death tripped up his heels? Has an indigestion imprisoned him, and all his gaiety, in a living dungeon? Or is he himself lost and buried amidst the rubbish of one of our larger, or of one of our Minor Theatres?

—“Alas! how changed from him,
That life of pleasure, and that soul of whim!”

But as this was no doubt the height of his ambition, why should we wish to debar him of it?

This brings us back, after our intended digression, to the subject from whence we set out,—the smaller theatres of the metropolis; which we visited lately, in hopes to find in them a romantic contrast to the presumptuous and exclusive pretensions of the legitimate drama, and to revive some of the associations of our youth above described.—The first attempt we made was at the Coburg, and we were completely baulked. Judge of our disappointment. This was not owing, we protest, to any fault or perversity of our own; to the crust and scales of formality which had grown over us; to the panoply of criticism in which we go armed, and which made us inaccessible to “pleasure's finest point;” or to the *chevaux-de-*

frise of objections, which cut us off from all cordial participation in what was going forward on the stage. No such thing. (We went not only willing, but determined to be pleased.) We had laid aside the pedantry of rules, the petulance of sarcasm, and had hoped to open once more, by stealth, the source of sacred tears, of bubbling laughter, and concealed sighs. We were not formidable. On the contrary, we were "made of penetrable stuff." Stooping from our pride of place, we were ready to be equally delighted with a clown in a pantomime, or a lord-mayor in a tragedy. We were all attention, simplicity, and enthusiasm. But we saw neither attention, simplicity, nor enthusiasm in any body else; and our whole scheme of voluntary delusion and social enjoyment was cut up by the roots. The play was indifferent, but that was nothing. The acting was bad, but that was nothing. The audience were low, but that was nothing. It was the heartless indifference and hearty contempt shown by the performers for their parts, and by the audience for the players and the play, that disgusted us with all of them. Instead of the rude, naked, undisguised expression of curiosity and wonder, of overflowing vanity, and unbridled egotism, there was nothing but an exhibition of the most petulant cockneyism and vulgar slang. All our former notions and theories were turned topsy-

turvy. The genius of St. George's Fields prevailed, and you felt yourself in a bridewell, or a brothel, amidst Jew-boys, pickpockets, prostitutes, and mountebanks, instead of being in the precincts of Mount Parnassus, or in the company of the Muses. The object was not to admire or to excel, but to vilify and degrade every thing. The audience did not hiss the actors (that would have implied a serious feeling of disapprobation, and something like a disappointed wish to be pleased), but they laughed, hooted at, nick-named, pelted them with oranges and witticisms, to show their unruly contempt for them and their art; while the performers, to be even with the audience, evidently slurred their parts, as if ashamed to be thought to take any interest in them, laughed in one another's faces, and in that of their friends in the pit, and most effectually marred the process of theatrical illusion, by turning the whole into a most unprincipled burlesque. We cannot help thinking that some part of this indecency and licentiousness is to be traced to the diminutive size of these theatres, and to the close contact into which these unmannerly censors come with the objects of their ignorant and unfeeling scorn. Familiarity breeds contempt. By too narrow an inspection, you take away that fine, hazy medium of abstraction, by which (in moderation) a play is best set off: you are;

as it were, admitted behind the scene ; “ see these puppets dallying ; ” shake hands, across the orchestra, with an actor whom you know, or take one you do not like by the beard, with equal impropriety :—you distinguish the paint, the individual features, the texture of the dresses, the patch-work and machinery by which the whole is made up ; and this in some measure destroys the effect, distracts attention, suspends the interest, and makes you disposed to quarrel with the actors as impostors, and “ not the men you took them for.” You see Mr. Booth, in Brutus, with every motion of his face *articulated*, with his under-jaws grinding out sentences, and his upper-lip twitching at words and syllables, as if a needle and thread had been passed through each corner of it, and the *gude wife* still continued sewing at her work :—you perceive the contortion and barrenness of his expression (in which there is only one form of bent brows, and close pent-up mouth for all occasions), the parsimony of his figure is exposed, and the refuse tones of his voice fall with undiminished vulgarity on the pained ear.

“ Turn we to survey ” where the Miss Dennetts, at the Adelphi Theatre (which should once more from them be called the *Sans Pareil*), weave the airy, the harmonious, liquid dance. Of each of them it might be said, and we believe has been said—

"Her, lovely Venus at a birth,
With two Sister Graces more,
To ivy-crowned Bacchus bore."

Such figures, no doubt, gave rise to the fables of ancient mythology, and might be worshipped. They revive the ideas of classic grace, life, and joy. They do not seem like taught dancers, Columbines, and figurantes on an artificial stage ; but come bounding forward like nymphs in vales of Arcady, or, like Italian shepherdesses, join in a lovely group of easy gracefulness, while "vernal airs attune the trembling leaves" to their soft motions. If they were nothing in themselves, they would be complete in one another. Each owes a double grace, youth, and beauty, to her reflection in the other two.' It is the principle of proportion or harmony personified. To deny their merit or criticise their style, is to be blind and dead to the felicities of art and nature. Not to feel the force of their united charm (united, yet divided, different and yet the same), is not to see the beauty of "three red roses on a stalk,"—or of the mingled hues of the rainbow, or of the halcyon's breast, reflected in the stream,—or "the witchery of the soft blue sky," or grace in the waving of the branch of a tree, or tenderness in the bending of a flower, or liveliness in the motion of a wave of the sea. We shall not try to defend them against the danc-

ing-school critics ; there is another school, different from that of the *pied a plomb* and *pirouette* cant, the school of taste and nature. In this school the Miss Dennetts are (to say the least) delicious novices. Theirs is the only performance on the stage (we include the Opera) that gives the uninitiated spectator an idea that dancing can be an emanation of instinctive gaiety, or express the language of sentiment. We might shew them to the Count Stendhal, who speaks so feelingly of the beauties of a dance by Italian peasant girls, as our three English Graces.

There is a Mr. Reeve, at the Adelphi, of whom report had spoken highly in his particular department as a mimic, and in whom we were considerably disappointed. He is not so good as Mathews, who, after all, is by no means a *fac-simile* of those he pretends to represent. We knew most of Mr. Reeve's likenesses, and that is the utmost we can say in their praise ; for we thought them very bad ones. They were very slight, and yet contrived to be very disagreeable. Farren was the most amusing, from a certain oddity of voice and manner in the ingenious and eccentric original. Harley, again, was not at all the thing. There was something of the external dress and deportment, but none of the spirit, the frothy essence. He made him out a great burly

swaggering ruffian, instead of being what he is—a pleasant, fidgetty person, pert as a jack-daw, light as a grasshopper. In short, from having seen Mr. Reeve, no one would wish to see Mr. Harley, though there is no one who has seen him but wishes to see him again; and though mimicry has the privilege of turning into ridicule the loftier pretensions of tragic heroes, we believe it always endeavours to set off the livelier peculiarities of comic ones in the most agreeable light. Mr. Kean was bad enough. It might have been coarse and repulsive enough, and yet like; but it wanted point and energy, and this was inexcusable. We have heard much of ludicrous and admirable imitations of Mr. Kean's acting. But the only person who ever caricatures Mr. Kean well, or from whose exaggerations he has any thing to fear, is himself.

There has been a new piece, the *Antiquary*, brought out at Covent-garden, founded on the admirable novel of that name, by the author of *Waverley*, but it is only a slight sketch of the story and character, and not, we think, equal to the former popular melo-dramas taken from the same prolific source. The characters in general were not very intelligibly brought out, nor very strikingly cast. Liston made but an indifferent Mr. Jonathan Oldbuck. He was dressed in a snuff-coloured coat and plain

bob-wig, and that was all. It was quaint and dry, and accordingly inefficient, and quite unlike his admirable portrait of Dominie Sampson, which is one of the finest pieces of acting on the stage, both for humour and feeling, invention and expression. The little odd ways and antiquarian whims and crotchetts of Mr. Oldbuck, even were they as well managed in the drama as they are exquisitely hit off in the novel, would hardly tell in Liston's hands. Emery made an impressive Edie Ochiltree ; but he was somewhat too powerful a preacher, and too sturdy a beggar. Miss Stephens sang one or two airs very sweetly, and was complimented at the end very rapturously and unexpectedly by the *ungallant* Mr. Oldbuck. The scene on the sea-shore, where she is in danger of being overtaken by the tide, with her father and old Edie, had an admirable effect, as far as the imitation of the rolling of the waves of the sea on a London stage could produce admiration. The part of old Elspeth of Craigie Burn Wood was strikingly performed by Mrs. Faucit, who, indeed, acts whatever she undertakes well ; and the scene with Lord Glenallan, in which she unfolds to him the dreadful story of his life, was given at much length and with considerable effect. But what can come up to the sublime, heart-breaking pathos, the terrific painting of the original work ? The story of this unhappy

feudal lord is the most harrowing in all these novels (rich as they are in the materials of nature and passion) : and the description of the old woman, who had been a principal subordinate instrument in the tragedy, is done with a more masterly and withering hand than any other. Her death-like appearance, her strange existence, like one hovering between this world and the next, or like a speaking corpse ; her fixed attitude, her complete forgetfulness of every thing but the one subject that loads her thoughts, her preternatural self-possession on that, her prophetic and awful denunciations, her clay-cold and shrivelled body, consumed and kept alive by a wasting fire within,—are all given with a subtlety, a truth, a boldness and originality of conception, that were never, perhaps, surpassed.

ADAPTATIONS OF SCOTT'S NOVELS, IVANHOE, ETC.*

WE have two new dramas taken from the romance of Ivanhoe, the one called *Ivanhoe at Covent Garden*, and the other under the title of *the Hebrew at Drury Lane*. It argues little for the force or redundancy of our original talents for tragic composition, when our authors of that description are periodical pensioners on the bounty of the Scottish press ; and

* 1820.

when, with all the craving which the public and the Managers feel for novelty in this respect, they can only procure it at second-hand by vamping up with new scenery, decorations, and dresses, what has been already rendered at once sacred and familiar to us in the closet. Mr. Walter Scott no sooner conjures up the Muse of old romance, and brings us acquainted with her in ancient hall, cavern, or mossy dell, than Messrs. Harris and Elliston, with all their tribe, instantly set their tailors to work to take the pattern of the dresses, their artists to paint the wild-wood scenery or some proud dungeon-keep, their musicians to compose the fragments of bewildered ditties, and their penmen to connect the author's scattered narrative and broken dialogue into a sort of theatrical join-hand. The thing is not ill-got up in general; it fills the coffers of the theatre for a time; gratifies public curiosity till another new novel appears; and probably flatters the illustrious prose-writer, who must be fastidious indeed, if, at the end of each representation, he exclaims with Hamlet, "I had as lief the town-crier had spoken my lines!"—It has been observed by an excellent judge, that it was next to impossible to spoil a picture of Titian's by copying it. Even the most indifferent wood-cut, a few scratches in an etching, gave something of a superior look of refinement, an

air of grace and grandeur ; the outline was so true, the disposition of light and shade so masterly in the original, that it could not be quite done away. So it is with these theatrical adaptations : the spirit of the real author shines through them in spite of many obstacles ; and about a twentieth part of his genius appears in them, which is enough. His canvas is cut down, to be sure ; his characters thinned out, the limbs and extremities of his plot are lopped away (cruel necessity !), and it is like showing a brick for a house. But then what is left is so fine ! The author's Muse is "instinct with fire" in every part, and the *disjecta membra poetæ*, like the polypus when hacked and hewed asunder, piece together again, or sprout out into new life. The other plays that we have seen taken from this stock are merely selections and transpositions of the borrowed materials : the Hebrew (we mean the principal character itself) is the only excrescence from it ; and though fantastic and somewhat feeble, compared with the solid trunk from which it grew, it is still no unworthy ornament to it, like the withered and variegated moss upon the knotted oak.—Of Ivanhoe itself, we wish to say a single word, before we proceed to either drama. It is the first attempt of Mr. Scott (we wish the writer would either declare himself, or give himself a *nom de guerre*, that we might

speak of him without either a periphrasis or impertinence)—it is, we say, Mr. Scott's first attempt on English ground, and it is, we think, only a comparative, but comparatively with himself, a decided failure. There are some few scenes in it, and one or two extraneous characters, equal to what he has before written ; but we think they are, *in comparison*, few ; and by being so distinctly detached as they are from the general groundwork (so that no two persons taking the work to dramatise would not pitch upon the same incidents and individuals to bring forward on the stage), show that the other parts of the story are without proportionable prominence and interest. In the other novels it was not so. The variety, the continued interest, the crowded groups, the ever-changing features, distracted attention, and perplexed the choice : the difficulty was not what to select, but what to reject. All was new, and all was equally, or nearly equally, good—teeming with life and throbbing with interest. But here no one, if called upon for a preference, can miss pointing out Friar Tuck in his cell, and the Jew and his daughter Rebecca. These remain, and stand out after the perusal, as above water mark, when the rest are washed away and forgotten. For want of the same pulse, the same veins of nature circling throughout, the body of the work is cold and co-

lourless. The author does not feel himself at home ; and tries to make up for cordial sympathy and bold action, by the minute details of his subject—by finishing his Saxon draperies, or furbishing up the armour of his Normans, with equal care and indifference—so that we seem turning over a book of antiquarian prints, instead of the pages of an admired novel-writer. In fact, we conceive, as a point of speculative criticism, that the genius of the author of Waverley, however lofty, and however extensive, still has certain discernible limits ; that it is strictly national ; that it is traditional ; that it relies on actual manners and external badges of character ; that it insists on costume and dialect ; and is one of individual character and situation, rather than of general nature. This was some time doubtful : but the present work “gives evidence of it.” Compare his Rob Roy with Robin Hood. What rich Highland blood flows through the veins of the one ; colours his hair, freckles his skin, bounds in his step, swells in his heart, kindles in his eye : what poor waterish puddle creeps through the soul of Locksley ; and what a lazy, listless figure he makes in his coat of Lincoln green, like a figure to let, in the novel of Ivanhoe ! Mr. Scott slights and slurs our archer good. His imagination mounts with Rob Roy, among his native wilds and cliffs, like an eagle to its lordly nest :

but it cannot take shelter with Robin Hood and *his* crew of outlaws in the Forest of Merry Sherwood : “*his* affections do not that way tend.” Like a good patriot and an honest man, he feels not the same interest in old English history, as in Scottish tradition ; the one is not bound up with his early impressions, with his local knowledge, with his personal attachments, like the other ; and we may be allowed to say, that our author’s genius soars to its enviable and exclusive height from the depth of his prejudices. He has described Scottish manners, scenery, and history so well, and made them so interesting to others, from his complete knowledge and intense love of his country. Why should we expect him to describe English manners and events as well ? On his native soil, within that hallowed circle of his warm affections and his keen observation, no one will pretend to cope with him. He has there a wide and noble range, over which his pen “ holds sovereign sway and masterdom ;” to wit, over the Highlands and the Lowlands, and the Tolbooth and the good town of Edinburgh, with “a far cry to Lochaw,” over gleaming lake and valley, and the bare mountain-path, over all ranks and classes of his countrymen, high and low, and over all that has happened to them for the last five hundred years, recorded in history, tradition, or old song. These

he may challenge for himself ; and if he throws down his gauntlet, no one but a madman will dare to take it up. But on this side the Tweed we have others as good, as he. The genius of that magic stream may say to him, “ Hitherto shalt thou come, but no further.” We have romances and novels of our own as good as Ivanhoe ; and we will venture to predict that the more this admirable and all but universal genius extends his rapid and unresisted career on this side the border, the more he will lose in reputation and in real strength—

Like kings who lose the conquests gain'd before,
By vain ambition still to make them more.

How feeble, how slight, how unsatisfactory and disjointed, did the adaptations from Guy Mannering, Rob Roy, and the Antiquary appear, contrasted with the story we had read ! The play of Ivanhoe at Covent Garden, on the contrary, seems to give all (or nearly so) that we remember distinctly in the novel ; and the Hebrew, which constantly wanders from it, without any apparent object or meaning, yet does so without exciting much indignation or regret. We have in both the scene, the indispensable scene, at the hermitage of Copmanhurst, between the Black Knight and Robin Hood's jolly Friar (which, however, has not half the effect on the stage

that it has in reading, though Mr. Emery plays the Friar, and sings a jolly stave for him admirably well, at Covent Garden)—we have the trial of Rebecca, and the threat to put her father to the torture, almost carried into execution at the castle of Torquilstone ; we have the siege and demolition of the castle itself ; we have the fair Rowena at one house, in her own proper shape ; and at the other, metamorphosed into the fairer and more lovely Israelite ; and at both we have Cedric the Saxon, Gurth the swineherd, and Wamba the jester, and Brian de Bois-Guilbert ; and what more would any one require in reason ? The details, however, of all these personages and transactions are much more accurately given, and more skilfully connected, in Ivanhoe than in the Hebrew ; and the former play is better got up than the latter in all the characters, with the exception of one, which it is needless to mention. Yet why should we not, envy apart ? Mr. Farren played Isaac of York well ; Mr. Kean played the Hebrew still better. As for the rest, Charles Kemble played the same character at one house that Mr. Penley, jun. did at the other : Mr. Emery was Friar Tuck at Covent Garden, Mr. Oxberry at Drury Lane : Mr. Macready was Sir Reginald Front de Bœuf, a character exactly fitted for his impetuous action and his smothered tremulous tones, which we cannot say of his other representa-

tive, Mr. Hamblin, though we have nothing to sati against him : Miss Foote looked the beautiful R^ebecca (all but the raven locks and dark eye-lashes) which Mrs. West played but insipidly, with Miss Carew to help her ; and Mrs. Faust was the wretched, but terrific daughter of the race of Torquilstone, a character omitted at the other house. As a literary composition, we have nothing to offer on Ivanhoe ; but the Hebrew requires a word or two of remark. As a play, it is ill-constructed, without proportion or connection. As a poem, it has its beauties, and those we think neither mean nor few. It is disjointed, without dramatic decorum, and sometimes even to a ludicrous degree : as where a principal hero, on hearing the sound of a horn or trumpet, jumps on a table to look out of a window, and receives an arrow in his breast from one of the besiegers, on which he is carried out apparently lifeless ; and yet he is presently after introduced again, as well as if no such accident had happened. But notwithstanding this, and many other errors of the same kind, and a weakness and languor in the general progress of the story, there are individual touches of nature and passion, which we can account for in no other way so satisfactorily as by imagining the author to be a man of genius. The flowers of poetry interspersed were often sad, but beautiful—

Like to that sanguine flower inscribed with woe—

the turns and starts of passion in feeble and wronged old age were often delicate and striking. Among these we might mention the Jew's comparison of his own feelings on receiving an unexpected kindness, to the cold and icy current of the river frozen by the winter, but melting in the genial warmth of the sun : his refusal, in the wanderings of his intellect, to go to witness his daughter's death in company with any one else ; "No : thou art not my child, I'll go alone :" and the fine conception of his hearing, in the deep and silent abstraction of his despair (before any one else), the sound of the trampling of the champion's steed, who comes to rescue her from destruction, which is, however, nearly ruined and rendered ridiculous by Mr. Penley's running in with armour on from the farthest end of the stage, as fast as his legs can carry him. Upon the whole, this character, compared to the rough draught in the novel, is like a curiously finished miniature, done after a bold and noble design. For the dark, massy beard, and coarse weather-beaten figure, which we attribute to Isaac of York, we have a few sprinkled grey hairs, and the shrivelled, tottering frame of the Hebrew ; and Mr. Kean's acting in it, in several places, was such as to terrify us, when we find from the play-bills that he is soon to act Lear. Of the two plays, we would then recommend it to our

readers to go to see Ivanhoe at Covent Garden : but for ourselves, we would rather see the Hebrew a second time at Drury Lane, though every time we go there it costs us three and sixpence more than at the other house—a serious sum!* Notwithstanding this repeated and heavy defalcation from our revenue, which really hurts our vanity not less than our interest, we must do the manager the justice to say, that we never laughed more heartily than we did at his Sir Charles Racket the other night. “Unkindness may do much,” but it is not a little matter that will hinder us from laughing as long and as loud as any body, “to the very top of our lungs,” at so rich a treat as Three Weeks after Marriage. Mr. Elliston never shines to more advantage than in light, genteel farce, after Mr. Kean’s tragedy. “Do you think I’ll sleep with a woman that doesn’t know what’s trumps?” It was irresistible. It might have been *encored* with few dissentient voices, and with no greater violation of established custom than the distributing three different performers, Mr. Connor, Mr. Yates, and Mrs. Davenport, in the pit and boxes, to hold a dialogue with a person on the stage, in the introductory interlude of The Manager in Distress, at Covent Garden. We, however, do not object to this novelty, if nobody else does, and if it is not repeated ;

* Mr. Elliston had suspended the Free List.—*Ed.*

and it certainly did not put us in an ill humour for seeing Mr. Jones's Too Late for Dinner. Mr. Jones is much such an author as he is an actor—wild, but agreeable, going all lengths without making much progress, determined to please, and succeeding by dint of noise, bustle, whim, and nonsense. There is neither much plot nor much point in the new farce ; but it tells, and keeps the house laughing by a sort of absurd extravagance and good humour. Besides, Mr. Jones plays in it himself, and exerts himself with his wonted alacrity ; so do Mr. Liston, Mr. Emery, Mrs. Davenport, and Miss Foote. The author has, indeed, cut out a cockney character for Liston (who is the Magnus Apollo of farce writers), as good as our old friend Lubin Log ; and the scene in which he comes in stuffing buns, and talking at the same time, till he nearly chokes himself in the double operation, is one that would do for Hogarth to paint, if he were alive ; or, as he is not, for Mr. Wilkie. Emery is a country bumpkin, who is learning French, to fit himself for travel into foreign parts ; and his Yorkshire dialect and foreign jargon, jumbled together, have a very odd effect. But Mr. Emery's acting, we are sorry to say, is not a subject for criticism : it is always just what it ought to be ; and it is impossible to praise it sufficiently, because there is never any opportunity for finding fault with

it. To criticise him, would be like criticising the countryman, who carried the pig under his cloak. He is always the very character he undertakes to represent; we mean, in his favourite and general cast of acting.

MR. ELLISTON'S ASSUMPTIONS; MR. MATHEWS AT HOME; CRITICS AND ACTORS.*

WE don't know where to begin this article—whether with Mr. Mathews and his Country Cousins; or with Harlequin *versus* Shakspeare; or Cinderella and the Little Glass Slipper; or the story of Goody Two-Shoes and the Fate of Calas, at the Summer Theatre of Sadler's Wells;—or with Mr. Booth's Lear, which we have seen with great pleasure; or with Mr. Kean's, which is a greater pleasure to come (so we anticipate), and which we see is put off to the last moment, lest, we suppose, as the play-bills announce, "the immortal Shakspeare should meet with opponents." And why should the immortal Shakspeare meet with opponents in this case? Nobody can tell. But to prevent so terrible and unlooked-for a catastrophe, and to protect the property of the theatre at so alarming a crisis from cries of "fire," the Manager has thought it his duty "to suspend the Free List during the representation, the public press excepted." As we have not the mortification

of the exclusion, nor the benefit of the exception, we care little about the matter, but as a curiosity in theatrical diplomacy. The anxiety of the manager about the double trust committed to him, the property of a great theatre and the fame of a great poet, is exemplary ; and the precautions he uses for their preservation no less admirable and efficacious : —so that if the tragedy of King Lear should pass muster for a night or two, without suffering the greatest indignities, it will be owing to the *suspension of the Free List* : if Mr. Kean should ride triumphant in a sea of passion, the king of sorrows, and drown his audience in a flood of tears, it will be owing to the *suspension of the Free List* : if the heart-rending tragedy of the immortal bard, as it was originally written, does not meet with the same untoward fate as the speaking pantomime of the late Mr. Garrick deceased, “altered by a professional gentleman of great abilities,” it will be owing to the *suspension of the Free List*. In a word, if the glory of the “great heir of fame” does not totter to its base at the representation of his noblest work, nor the property of the theatre tumble about our ears the very first night, we shall have to thank Mr. Elliston’s timely care in the *suspension of the Free List* ! “Strange that an old poet’s memory should be as mortal as a new manager’s wits!” This bold

anticipation and defiance of opposition, where none can be expected, is not very politic, though it may be very valiant. It is bringing into litigation an unencumbered estate (we mean that part of it relating to the character of Shakspeare), of which we are in full and quiet possession. It is not only waking the sleeping lion, but kicking him. Mr. Elliston's shutting his doors in the face of the Free List is like Don Quixote's throwing open the cages of the wild beasts in the caravan, and insisting that they should come out and fight him. If the Free List were that formidable and ill-disposed body of sworn foes to Shakspeare, that tasteless "monster that the world ne'er saw," and into which the manager's officious zeal for the interests of the theatre would convert them, it were best to let them alone, and not court their hostility by invidious and impracticable disqualifications. If they are determined to *damn* Shakspeare, there is no help for it: if they hold no such antipathy to him, "if that they love the gentle bard," why should their "unhoused, free condition, be put in circumscription and confine," during the manager's pleasure? We are in no great pain for the deathless renown of Shakspeare: but we really entertain apprehensions that these Berlin and Milan decrees (in imitation of a great man), which our arbitrary theatrical dictator is in the habit of issuing

at the bottom of his play-bills, may be of no service to the life-renters of Drury Lane. We hear a report (which we do not believe, and shall be happy to contradict) that the Drury Lane Management have put in a claim to the exclusive representation of Lear, and have proposed to suspend the performance at the other house. This we think too much, even for the gratuitous and imposing pretensions of Mr. Elliston. We shall, at this rate, soon see stuck up about the town,—“Shakspeare performed at this theatre, for a few nights only, by permission of the Manager of Drury Lane!” Why, this would be a sweeping clause indeed, a master-stroke at the liberty of the stage. It cannot be. It is “as if he would confine the interminable.” He may seat himself in the manager’s chair, like the lady in the lobster, but the tide of Shakspeare’s genius must be allowed to take its full scope, and overflow, like the Nile, the banks on either side of Russell Street. Our poet is national, not private property. The *quondam* proprietor of the Circus cannot catch this mighty Proteus to make a Harlequin of him: it is not in the bond that he should not now let any one else but Mr. Kean play Shakspeare, as he once objected to let him play at all! We suspect this idle report must have arisen, not from any hint of an injunction, on the part of Mr. Elliston, against “a beard

so old and white" as Mr. Booth's; but as a critical reproof to the Covent Garden Managers, for reviving Nahum Tate's Lear, instead of the original text; and as a friendly suggestion to them instantly to deprive Cordelia of her lover, and to exclude the Free List, "*lest the immortal Shakspeare should meet with opponents!*" But we have said enough on this ridiculous subject.

We proceed to another; Mr. Mathews's Country Cousins. This is the third season that this gentleman has entertained the town successfully, and we trust profitably to himself, by a *melange* of imitations, songs, narrative, and ventriloquism, entirely of his own getting up. For one man to be able to amuse the public, or, as the phrase is, to *draw houses*, night after night, by a display of his own resources and feats of comic dexterity alone, shews great variety and piquancy of talent. The Country Cousins is popular, like the rest: the audiences are, at this present speaking, somewhat thinner, but they do not laugh the less. We do not regret that Mr. Mathews has been transferred from the common stage to a stage of his own. He himself complained, at first, (as the cause of this removal), that he had not regular opportunities afforded him at Covent Garden for appearing in legitimate comedy, which was the chief object of his study and his ambition.

If it were not the most ridiculous of all things to expect self-knowledge from any man, this ground of complaint would be sufficiently curious.

Mr. Mathews was seldom or never put into any characters but those of mimicry and burlesque by the managers of Covent Garden : into what characters has he put himself since he has been upon his own hands ? why, seldom or never into any but those of mimicry and burlesque. We remember on some former occasion throwing out a friendly discouragement of Mr. Mathews's undertaking the part of Rover in *Wild Oats* (as not exactly fitted to his peculiar cast of acting), which we had reason to think was not received in good part ; yet how did he himself propose to make it palatable, and how did he really contrive to make it tolerable, to the audience ? —By the introduction of imitations of all the actors on the London boards. It is not easy to give a character of a man (without making a fool of him) with which he shall be satisfied : but actors are in general so infatuated with applause, or sore from disappointment, that they are, of all men, the least accessible to reason. We critics are a sort of people whom they very strangely look upon as in a state of natural hostility with them. A person who undertakes to give an account of the acted drama in London, may be supposed to be led to this by some fondness for,

and some knowledge of, the stage : here, then, "there's sympathy" between the actor and the critic. He praises the good, he holds out a warning to the bad. The last may have cause to complain, but the first do not thank you a bit the more. You cheer them in the path of glory, shew them where to pluck fresh laurels, or teach them to shun the precipice on which their hopes may be dashed to pieces ; you devote your time and attention to them ; are romantic, gay, witty, profound in adorning their art with every embellishment you have in store to make it interesting to others ; you occupy the eyes and ears of the town with their names and affairs ; weigh their merits and defects in daily, weekly, monthly scales, with as much preparation and formality as if the fate of the world depended on their failure or success ; and yet they seem to suppose that your whole business and only object are to degrade and vilify them in public estimation. What you say in praise of any individual, is set down to the score of his merit : what you say otherwise, in common justice to yourself, is considered as a mere effusion of spleen, stupidity, and spite—as if you took a particular pleasure in torturing his feelings. Yet, upon second thoughts, there may be some ground for all this. We do not like to have a physician feel our pulse, shake his head, and prescribe a regimen : many persons have

objection to sit for their pictures, and there is, perhaps, something in the very fact of being criticised, to which human nature is not easily reconciled. To have every word you speak scanned, every look scrutinised,—never to be sure whether you are right or wrong; to have it said that this was too high, that too low; to be abused by one person for the very same thing that another “applauds you to the very echo, that does applaud again;” to have it hinted that one’s very best effort only just wanted something to make it perfect; and that certain other parts which we thought tolerable, were not to be endured; to be taken in pieces in this manner, turned inside out, to be had up at a self-elected tribunal of impertinence,—tried, condemned, and acquitted every night,—to hear the solemn defence, the ridiculous accusation,—to be subjected to a living anatomy,—to be made the text of a perpetual running commentary,—to be set up in an antithesis, to be played upon in an alliteration,—to have one’s faults separated from one’s virtues, like the sheep from the goats by the good shepherd,—to be shorn bare and have a mark set upon one,—to be bewitched and bedevilled by the critics,—to lie at the mercy of every puny whipster, and not be suffered to know whether one stands on one’s head or one’s heels till he tells one how—has, to be sure, something very perplexing and very provoking

in it ; and it is not so much to be wondered at that the subjects of this kind of critical handling undergo the operation with so little patience as they do. They particularly hate those writers who pretend to patronize them, for this takes away even the privilege of resentment.

An actor, again, is seldom satisfied with being extolled for what he is, unless you admire him for being what he is not. A great tragic actress thinks herself particularly happy in comedy, and it is a sort of misprision of treason not to say so. Your pen may grow wanton in praise of the broad farcical humour of a low comedian ; but if you do not cry him up for the fine gentleman, he threatens to leave the stage. Most of our best comic performers came out in tragedy as their favourite line ; and Mr. Mathews does not think it enough to enliven a whole theatre with his powers of drollery, and whim, and personal transformation, unless, by way of preface and apology, he first delivers an epitaph on those talents for the legitimate drama which were so prematurely buried at Covent Garden Theatre !—If we were to speak our minds, we should say, that Mr. Mathews shines particularly, neither as an actor, nor a mimic of actors, but that his forte is a certain general tact, and versatility of comic power. You would say he is a clever performer : you would guess he is a

cleverer man. His talents are not pure, but mixed. He is best when he is his own prompter, manager, and performer, orchestra, and scene-shifter; and, perhaps, to make the thing complete, the audience should be of his own providing too.—If we had never known any thing more of Mr. Mathews than the account we have heard of his imitating the interior of a German family, the wife lying a-bed grumbling at her husband's staying out, the husband's return home drunk, and the little child's *paddling* across the room to its own bed as soon as it hears him, we should set him down for a man of genius. These felicitous strokes are, however, casual and intermittent in him:—they proceed from him rather by chance than design, and are followed up by others equally gross and superficial. Mr. Mathews wants taste, or has been spoiled by the taste of the town, whom “he must live to please, and please to live.” His talent, though limited, is of a lively and vigorous fibre; capable of a succession of shifts and disguises; he is *up to* a number of good things—single hits here and there, but by the suddenness and abruptness of his turns, he surprises and shocks oftener than he satisfies. His wit does not move the muscles of the mind, but, like some practical joker, gives one a good rap on the knuckles, or a lively box on the ear: He serves up a *pic-nic* entertainment of scraps and odd

ends (some of them, we must say, old ones). He is like a host who will not let us swallow a mouthful, but offers us something else, and directly after brings us the same dish again. He is in a continual hurry and disquietude to please, and destroys half the effect by trying to increase it. He is afraid to trust for a moment to the language of nature and character, and wants to translate it into pantomime and grimace, like a writing-master, who for the letter *I* has the hieroglyphic of an eye staring you in the face. Mr. Mathews may be said to have taken tithe of half the talents of the stage and of the town ; yet his variety is not always charming. There is something dry and meagre in his jokes ; they do not lard the lean earth as he walks, but seem as if they might be written upon parchment. His humour, in short, is not like digging into a fine Stilton cheese, but is more like the scrapings of Shabsuger.—As an actor, we think he cannot rise higher than a waiter (certainly not a dumb one), or than Mr. Wiggins. In this last character, in particular, by a certain panic-struck expression of countenance at the persecution of which the hen-pecked husband is the victim, and by the huge, unwieldy helplessness of his person, unable to escape from it and from the rabble of boys at his heels, he excites shouts of laughter, and hits off the humour of the thing to an exact perfection.

In general, his performance is of that kind which implies manual dexterity, or an assumption of bodily defect, rather than mental capacity: take from Mr. Mathews's drollest parts an odd shuffle in the gait, a restless volubility of speech and motion, a sudden suppression of features, or the continual repetition of some cant phrase with unabated vigour, and you reduce him to almost total insignificance, and a state of still life. He is not therefore like

A clock that wants both hands,
As useless when it goes as when it stands;

for only keep him going, and he bustles about the stage to some purpose. As a mimic of other actors, Mr. Mathews fails as often as he succeeds (we call it a failure, when it is with difficulty we can distinguish the person intended); and when he succeeds, it is more by seizing upon some peculiarity, or exaggerating some defect, than by hitting upon the true character or prominent features. He gabbles like Incledon, or croaks like Suett, or lisps like Young; but when he attempts the expressive silver-tongued cadences of John Kemble, it is the shadow of a shade. If we did not know the contrary, we should suppose he had never heard the original, but was imitating some one who had. His best imitations are taken from something characteristic or absurd that has struck

his fancy, or occurred to his observation in real life—such as a chattering footman, a drunken coachman, a surly traveller, or a garrulous old Scotch-woman. This last we would fix upon as Mr. Mathews's *chef-d'œuvre*. It was a portrait of common nature, equal to Wilkie or Teniers—as faithful, as simple, as delicately humorous, and with a slight dash of pathos; but without one particle of caricature, of vulgarity, or ill-nature. We see no reason why the ingenious artist should not show his Country Cousins a gallery of such portraits, and of no others, once a year. He might exhibit it every night for a month, and we should go to see it every night! What has impressed itself on our memory as the next best thing to this exquisite piece of genuine painting, was the broad joke of the abrupt proposal of a mutton-chop to the man who is sea-sick, and the convulsive marks of abhorrence with which it is received. The representation also of the tavern-beau in the Country Cousins, who is about to swallow a lighted candle for a glass of brandy and water, as he is going drunk to bed, is well feigned and admirably humoured; with many others, too numerous to mention. It is more to our performer's credit to suppose that the songs which he sings with such rapidity and vivacity of effect are not of his own composing; and as to his ventriloquism, it is yet in its infancy. The

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fault of these exhibitions—that which appears “first, midst, and last” in them—is that they turn too much upon caricaturing the most common-place and worn-out topics of ridicule—the blunders of Frenchmen in speaking English,—the mispronunciations of the cockney dialect,—the ignorance of Country Cousins, and the impertinence and foppery of relations in town. It would seem too likely, from the uniform texture of these pieces, that Mr. Mathews had passed his whole time in climbing to the top of the Monument, or had never been out of a tavern or a stage-coach, a Margate-hoy or a Dover packet-boat. We do not deny the merit of some of the cross-readings out of the two languages ; but certainly we think the quantity of French and English jargon put into the mouths of French and English travellers all through these imitations must lessen their popularity instead of increasing it, as two-thirds of Mr. Mathews’s auditors, we should imagine, cannot know the point on which the jest turns. We grant that John Bull is always very willing to laugh at Mounseer, if he knew why or how—perhaps, even without knowing how or why ! But we thought many of the jokes of this kind, however well contrived or intended, miscarried in their passage through the pit, and long before they reached the two-shilling gallery.

A new pantomime, called *Shakspeare versus Har-*

lequin, has been produced at Drury Lane Theatre. It is called "a speaking pantomime :" we had rather it had said nothing. It is better to act folly than to talk it. The heels, and wand, and motley coat of Harlequin are sacred to nonsense ; but the words, the cap and wings of Mercury (who was here also made the representative of Shakspeare), are worthy of a better use. The essence of pantomime is practical absurdity, keeping the wits in constant chase, coming upon one by surprise, and starting off again before you can arrest the fleeting phantom : the essence of this piece was prosing stupidity remaining like a mawkish fixture on the stage, and overcoming your impatience by the force of *ennui*. A speaking pantomime (such as this one) is not unlike a flying wagon : but we do not want a pantomime to move in minuet time, nor to have Harlequin's light wand changed into a leaden mace. If we must have a series of shocks and surprises, of violations of probability, common sense, and nature, to keep the brain and senses in a whirl, let us, at least, have them hot and hot, let them "charge on heaps, that we may lose distinction in *absurdity*," and not have time to doze and yawn over them, in the intervals of the battle. The bringing Harlequin to the test of reason resembles the old story of hedging in the cuckoo, and surpasses the united genius of the late

Mr. Garrick (to whom this dull farce is ascribed), and of the professional gentleman who has fitted the above productions of "the olden times" (viz. those of the late Mr. Garrick) to modern taste! After all, though Harlequin is tried by three grave judges, who are very unnecessarily metamorphosed into three old women, no competition, no collision takes place between him and the genius of Shakspeare, unless Mr. T. Cooke's playing very cleverly on a variety of musical instruments, so as to ravish the heart of Miss Dolly Snip (Madame Vestris), can be construed into so many proofs of the superiority of Shakspeare's Muse! Again, Mr. Harley, as Harlequin, and Mr. Oxberry (as a country clown) get up into a tree to see the sport, from which it is as difficult to dislodge them as owls from an ivy-bush; and the sport is to see Joey Snip, the tailor, have his head cut off, and walk with it about the stage, and, unlike the sign of the good woman, talk without his tongue. The slicing off a blackamoor's head or two with the stroke of a scymitar, provided the thing is done quickly, and instantly got out of sight, we do not much object to; but we do not like to have a ghastly spectre of this sort placed before us for a whole evening, as the heads of the rebel Scotch lords were stuck on Temple-bar for half a century. It may be well said indeed, *Quod sic mihi*

ostendis incredulus odi. Perhaps this exhibition of posthumous horror and impertinence might be meant as a sly hit at the ghost of Hamlet.

See o'er the stage the ghost of *Munden* stalks.

If so, we cry the manager mercy. We must add, that the strength of the theatre was put in requisition for this piece, and if it could have been saved, it would. Miss Tree, to enliven so many dreary objects, danced a *pas seul*. We would rather see this young lady dance round a may-pole at a country wake or fair.

But thou, oh Hope, with eyes so fair,
What was thy enchanting measure?
Still it whisper'd promised pleasure,
And bad the lovely scenes at distance hail.

We could not help repeating these lines as we saw the youngest of the Miss Dennetts, the tallest of the three, resume the part of Cinderella at Covent Garden,—restored, like Psyche, to her late-lost home, and transformed by the little hump-backed fairy, from a poor house-maid to a bright princess, drinking pleasure and treading air. This is a consummation more devoutly to be wished than the changing of a pipkin into a sign-post, or a wheel-barrow into a china-shop. A Fairy Tale is the true history of the human heart—it is a dream of youth realized! How many country-girls have fancied themselves princesses, nay,

what country-girl ever was there that, some time or other, did not? A Fairy Tale is what the world would be, if all had their wishes or their deserts—if our power and our passions were equal. We cannot be at a loss for a thousand bad translations of the story of Cinderella, if we look around us in the boxes. But the real imitation is on the stage. If we could always see the flowers open in the spring, or hear soft music, or see Cinderella dance, or dream we did, life itself would be a Fairy Tale. Miss Eliza Dennett is much improved, combines a little cluster of graces in her own person, and “in herself sums all delight.” She has learned to add precision to ease, and firmness of movement to the utmost harmony of form. In the scene where Cinderella is introduced at court, and is led out to dance by the enamoured prince, she bows as if she had a diadem on her head, moves as if she had just burst from fetters of roses, folds her arms as the vine curls its tendrils, and hurries from the scene, after the loss of her faithless slipper, as if she had to run a race with the winds. We had only one thing to desire, that she and her lover, instead of the new ballet, had danced the *Minuet de la cour* with the *Gavot*, as they do in the *Dansomanie*; that we might have called the *Minuet de la cour* divine, and the *Gavot* heavenly, and exclaimed once more, with more than artificial rapture

—“Such were the joys of our dancing days!” We do not despair of seeing this alteration adopted, as our recommendations are sometimes attended to: and in that case we shall feel——But the mechanical anticipation of an involuntary burst of sentiment in supposed circumstances is in vile taste.

VULGARITY IN CRITICISM; JANUS
WEATHERCOCK; KNOWLES' VIRGI-
NIUS.*

THE Drama is a subject of which we could give a very entertaining account once a month, if there were no plays acted all the year. But, as some artists have said of nature, "the Theatres put us out." The only article we have written on this matter that has given us entire satisfaction — (we answer, be it observed, for nobody but ourselves) — is the one we wrote in the winter, when, in consequence of two great public calamities, the theatres were closed for some weeks together. We seized that lucky opportunity to take a peep into the raree-show of our own fancies,—the moods of our own minds,—and a very pretty little kaleidoscope it made! —Our readers, we are sure, remember the description. Our head is stuffed full of recollections on the subject of the Drama, some of older, some of later date, but all treasured up with more or less

fondness ; we, in short, love it, and what we love we can talk of for ever. We love it as well as Mr. Weathercock loves maccaroni. But we love it best at a distance. We like to be a hundred miles off from the acted drama in London, and to get a friend (who may be depended on) to give an account of it for us, which we read, at our leisure, under the shade of a clump of lime-trees. What is the use indeed of coming to town, merely to discover that Mr. Elliston is “fat, fair, and forty,” and becomes silk hose worse than fleecy hosiery ?

Odious, in *satin* ! 'Twould a saint provoke !

We had rather stay where we are, and think how young, how genteel, how sprightly Lewis was at seventy ! Garrick, too, was fat and pursy ; but who ever perceived it through that airy soul of his, that life of mind, that bore him up “like little wanton boys that swim on bladders ?” Or why should we take coach to prevent our friend and coadjutor of the whimsical name,—that Bucolic Juvenile,* the Sir Piercie Shafton of the London Magazine,—from carrying off his Mysie Happer, the bewitching Miss Brunton, from our critical advances, and forestalling our praises of the grey twinkling eyes, the large white teeth, and querulous catechising voice of this

* Janus Weathercock (Mr. Wainwright.)

accomplished little rustic? We shall leave him in full possession of his prize;—she shall be his *Protection*, and he shall be her *Audacity*: but we cannot consent to give up to his agreeable importunity our right and interest in the Miss Dennetta—the fair, the “inexpressive three.” We will not erase their names from our pages, but twine them in cypher, as they are “written in our heart’s tables,”—though they do not dance at the Opera! We have not this gentleman’s exquisitely happy knack in the geography of criticism: nor do we carry a map of London in our pockets to make out an exact scale of merit and *virtù*; nor judge of black eyes, a white cheek, and so forth, by the bills of mortality. We do not hate pathos because it is found in the Borough; our taste (such as it is) can cross the water, by any of the four bridges, in search of spirit and nature; we can make up our minds to beauty even at Whitechapel! Our friend and correspondent, Janus, grieves and wonders at this. He asks us why we do not express his sentiments instead of our own? and we answer, “It is because we are not you.” He runs away from vulgar places and people, as from the plague; swoons at the mention of the Royal Coburg; mimics his barber’s pronunciation of *Ashley’s*; and is afraid to trust himself at Sadler’s Wells, lest his clothes should be covered with gingerbread, and

spoiled with the smell of gin and tobacco. Now we, in our turn, laugh at all this. We are never afraid of being confounded with the vulgar; nor is our time taken up in thinking of what is ungenteel, and persuading ourselves that we are mightily superior to it. The gentlemen in the gallery, in Fielding's time, thought every thing *low*; and our friend, Mr. Weathercock, presents his compliments to us, and tells us we are wrong in condescending to any thing beneath "Milanie's foot of fire." We have no notion of condescending in any thing we write about: we seek for truth and beauty wherever we can find them, and think that with these we are safe from contamination. "Entire affection scorneth nicer hands." Our comparative negligence, in this respect, probably arises from the difference that exists between our dress and that of our correspondent. A good judge has said, "a man's mind is parcel of his fortunes,"—and a man's taste is part of his dress. If we wore "diamond rings on our fingers, antique cameos in our breast-pins, cambric pocket-handkerchiefs breathing forth Attargul, and pale lemon-coloured kid gloves," our perceptions might be strangely altered. We might then think Mr. Young "the perfect gentleman both on and off the stage," and consider Mr. Jones's "cut-steel watch chain quite refreshing." As it is, we differ from him on

most of the above points. Yet, for any thing we see to the contrary, we might safely have staid in the country another month, and deputed the modern Euphuist, as our tire-man of the theatre, to adjust Mr. Kemble's boots, to tie on Mr. Abbott's sash to his liking, to dry Miss Stephens's bonnet, and dye Miss Tree's stockings any colour but blue :—but we heard from good authority that there was a new tragedy worth seeing, and also that it was written by an old friend of ours. *That* there was no resisting. So “we came, saw, and were satisfied.”—*Virginius* is a good play :—we repeat it. It is a real tragedy; a sound historical painting. Mr. Knowles has taken the facts as he found them, and expressed the feelings that would naturally arise out of the occasion. Strange to say, in this age of poetical egotism, the author, in writing his play, has been thinking of *Virginius* and his daughter more than of himself! This is the true imagination, to put yourself in the place of others, and to feel and speak for them. Our unpretending poet travels along the high road of nature and the human heart, and does not turn aside to pluck pastoral flowers in primrose lanes, or hunt gilded butterflies over enamelled meads, breathless and exhausted ;—nor does he, with vain ambition, “strike his lofty head against the stars.” So far, indeed, he may thank the gods for not having

made him poetical. Some cold, formal, affected, and interested critics have not known what to make of this. It was not what *they* would have done. One finds fault with the style as poor, because it is not inflated. Another can see nothing in it, because it is not interlarded with modern metaphysical theories, unknown to the ancients. A third declares that it is all borrowed from Shakspeare, because it is true to nature. A fourth pronounces it a superior kind of melodrama, because it pleases the public. The two last things to which the dull and envious ever think of attributing the success of any work (and yet the only ones to which genuine success is attributable), are Genius and Nature. The one they hate, and of the other they are ignorant. The same critics who despise and slur the Virginius of Covent Garden, praise the Virginius and the David Rizzio of Drury Lane, because (as it should appear) there is nothing in these to rouse their dormant spleen, stung equally by merit or success, and to mortify their own ridiculous, inordinate, and hopeless vanity. Their praise is of a piece with their censure; and equally from what they applaud and what they condemn, you perceive the principle of their perverse judgments. They are soothed with flatness and failure, and doat over them with parental fondness; but what is above their strength, and demands their admiration, they

shrink from with loathing, and an oppressive sense of their own imbecility: and what they dare not openly condemn, they would willingly secrete from the public ear! We have described this class of critics more than once, but they breed still: all that we can do is to sweep them from our path as often as we meet with them, and to remove their dirt and cobwebs as fast as they proceed from the same noisome source. Besides the merits of Virginius as a literary composition, it is admirably adapted to the stage. It presents a succession of pictures. We might suppose each scene almost to be copied from a beautiful bas-relief, or to have formed a group on some antique vase. "'Tis the taste of the ancients, 'tis classical lore." But it is a speaking and a living picture we are called upon to witness. These figures so strikingly, so simply, so harmoniously combined, start into life and action, and breathe forth words, the soul of passion—inflamed with anger, or melting with tenderness. Several passages of great beauty were cited in a former article on this subject; but we might mention in addition, the fine imaginative apostrophe of Virginius to his daughter, when the story of her birth is questioned:

I never saw you look so like your mother
In all my life—

the exquisite lines ending,

..... The lie
Is most unfruitful then, that makes the flower—
The very flow'r our bed connubial grew
To prove its barrenness——

or the sudden and impatient answer of Virginius to Numitorius, who asks if the slave will swear Virginia is her child—

To be sure she will ! Is she not his slave ?
or again, the dignified reply to his brother, who reminds him it is time to hasten to the Forum—

Let the forum wait for us !

This is the true language of nature and passion ; and all that we can wish for, or require, in dramatic writing. If such language is not poetical, it is the fault of poets, who do not write as the heart dictates ! We have seen plays that produced much more tumultuous applause ; none scarcely that excited more sincere sympathy. There were no clap-traps, no sentiments that were the understood signals for making a violent uproar ; but we heard every one near us express heartfelt and unqualified approbation ; and tears more precious supplied the place of loud huzzas. Each spectator appeared to appeal to, and to judge from, the feelings of his own breast, not from vulgar clamour ; and we trust the success will be more lasting and secure, as its foundations are laid in the deep and proud humility of nature. Mr.

Knowles owes every thing that an author can owe to the actors ; and they owed every thing to their attention to truth and to real feeling. Mr. Macready's Virginius is his best and most faultless performance, —at once the least laboured and the most effectual. His fine, manly voice sends forth soothing, impassioned tones, that seem to linger round, or burst with terrific grandeur from the home of his heart. Mr. Kemble's Icilius was heroic, spirited, fervid, the Roman warrior and lover : and Miss Foote was "the freeborn Roman maid," with a little bit, a delightful little bit, of the English school-girl in her acting. We incline to the *ideal* of our own country-women, after all, when they are so young, so innocent, so handsome. We are both pleased and sorry to hear a report which threatens us with the loss of so great a favourite ; and one chief source of our regret will be, that she will no longer play Virginia. The scenery allotted to this tragedy encumbered the stage, and the simplicity of the play. Temples and pictured monuments adorned the scene, which were not in existence till five hundred years after the date of the story ; and the ruins of the Capitol, of Constantine's arch, and the temple of Jupiter Stator, frowned at once on the death of Virginia, and the decline and fall of the Roman empire. As to the dresses, we leave them to our deputy of the ward-

robe : but, we believe, they were got right at last, with some trouble. In the printed play, we observe a number of passages marked with inverted commas, which are omitted in the representation. This is the case almost uniformly wherever the words "Tyranny," or "Liberty," occur. Is this done by authority, or is it prudence in the author, "*lest the courtiers offended should be?*" Is the name of Liberty to be struck out of the English language, and are we not to hate tyrants even in an old Roman play ? "Let the galled jade wince : our withers are unwrung ;" We turn to a pleasanter topic, and are glad to find an old and early friend unaltered in sentiment as he is unspoiled by success :— the same boy-poet, after a lapse of years, as when we first knew him ; unconscious of the wreath he has woven round his brow, laughing and talking of his play just as if it had been written by any body else, and as simple-hearted, downright, and honest as the unblemished work he has produced !*

* Generosity and simplicity are not the characteristic virtues of poets.' It has been disputed whether "an honest man is the noblest work of God." But we think an honest poet is so.

NEW ENGLISH OPERA HOUSE; FARREN.
—INEXPEDIENCY OF MANY THEATRES;
TERRY.—JONES.—TOKELY.—LISTON.*

IT is now the middle of July, when we are by turns drenched with showers and scorched with sun-beams; the winter theatres are closed, and the summer ones have just opened, soon to close again—

Like marigolds with the sun's eye.

We are not, however, in the number of those who deprecate the shortness of the summer season, as one of the miseries of human life, or who think little theatres better than big. We like a play-house in proportion to the number of happy human faces it contains (and a play-house seldom contains many wretched ones)—and again, (we like a play best when we do not see the faces of the actors too near) We do not want to be informed, as at the Little Theatre in the Haymarket, that part of the rich humour of Mr. Liston's face arises from his having lost a tooth in front, nor to see Mr. Jones's eyes roll more meteor-

* July, 1820.

ous than ever. At the larger theatres we only discover that the ladies paint red: at the smaller ones we can distinguish when they paint white. We see defects enough at a distance, and we can always get near enough (in the pit) to see the beauties. Those who go to the boxes do not go to see the play, but to make a figure, and be thought something of themselves (so far they probably succeed, at least in their own opinion): and if the Gods cannot hear, they make themselves heard. We do not like *private theatricals*. We like every thing to be what it is. We have no fancy for seeing the actors look like part of the audience, nor for seeing the pit invade the boxes, nor the boxes shake hands with the galleries. We are for a proper distinction of ranks—at the theatre. While we are laughing at the broad farcical humour of the Agreeable Surprise, or critically examining Mrs. Mardyn's dress in the Will, we do not care to be disturbed by some idle whisper, or mumbling disapprobation of an old beau, or antiquated dowager in a high head-dress, close at our ear, but in a different part of the house.—Mr. Arnold has taken care of this at the New English Opera-house in the Strand, of which he is proprietor and patentee. The “Great Vulgar and the Small” (as Cowley has it) are there kept at a respectful distance. The boxes are perched up so high above the pit, that it

gives you a head-ache to look up at the beauty and fashion that nightly adorn them with their thin and scattered constellations ; and then the gallery is “ raised so high above all height,” it is nearly impossible for the eye to scale it, while a little miserable shabby upper-gallery is partitioned off with an iron railing, through which the poor one-shilling devils look like half-starved prisoners in the Fleet, and are a constant butt of ridicule to the genteeler rabble beneath them. Then again (so vast is Mr. Arnold’s genius for separating and combining), you have a saloon, a sweet pastoral retreat, where any love-sick melancholy swain, or romantic nymph, may take a rural walk to Primrose-hill, or Chalk-farm, by the side of painted purling streams, and sickly flowering shrubs, without once going out of the walls of the theatre :——

Such tricks hath strong Imagination !

If the Haymarket has been praised by a contemporary critic (of whom we might say, that he is *alter et idem*) for being as hot as an oven in the midst of the dog-days, the Lyceum, on the other hand, is as cool as a well ; and much might, we think, be said on both sides. As a matter of taste, or fancy, or prejudice (we shall not pretend to say which), we do not greatly like the New English Opera-house. The

house is *new*, the pieces are *new*, the company are *new*, and we do not know what to make of any of them. As to the things that are acted there, they are a sort of pert, patched-up, insipid, flippant attempt at mediocrity. They are like the odd-ends and scraps of all the rejected pieces which have come into the manager's possession, in virtue of his office, for a length of time ; and which he has stitched and tacked together in such a way that neither the authors nor the public can know any thing of the matter. They are a condensed essence of all the vapid stuff that has been suppressed at home or acted abroad for a number of years last past. Visions of farces, operas, and interludes—thin, blue, fluttering, gauzy appearances—mock the empty sight, elude the public comprehension, and the critic's grasp. The worst of these slender, wire-drawn productions is, that there is nothing to praise in them, nor any thing to condemn. They “present no mark” to friend or foe. “You may as well take aim at the edge of a pen-knife,” as try to pick any thing out of them. They are trifling, tedious, frivolous, and vexatious. The best is, they do not last long, and “one bubble” (to borrow an illusion from an eloquent divine, in treating on a graver subject) “knocks another on the head, and both rush together into oblivion!”—Miss Kelly is here ; she might as well

be a hundred miles off. She is not good at child's play, at the *make-believe* fine-lady, or the *make-believe* waiting-maid. Hers is *bond fide* downright acting, and she must have something to do, in order to do it properly. She is too clever and too knowing to act a part totally without meaning, such as that lately given her in the Promissory Note. Such was not her Yarico. Ah! there were tones, and looks, and piercing sighs in her representation of the fond, injured, sun-burnt Indian maid, that make it difficult to think of her in any inferior part, or to speak slightly of any theatre in which she is concerned: but critics, as it has been said of judges, must not give way to their feelings. There is Wrench here, too, as easy as an old glove, the same careless, hair-brained, idle, impudent, good-humoured, lackadaisical sort of a gentleman as ever; there is Harley too, who has not been spoiled by the town since we first saw him here:—then there is Mr. Rowbotham, a grave young man, a new hand, very like the real, the prudent Mr. Thomas Inkle: *encore un coup*, we have Mr. Bartley, who, if not a new hand, is fresh returned from America, and as much at home on these boards as before he went abroad: in the governor of Barbadoes, he had quite a Transatlantic look with him: there is also Mr. Westbourn (we think he is at this house) and a Mr. Wilkinson, and

a Mr. Richardson (whose names and persons we are apt to confound together), and Mr. Pearman (whom it is not possible to mistake for any one else) and Miss Stevenson (a very provoking young thing), and Miss Love, and Mrs. Grove, and a whole *Sylva Critica* of actors and actresses, of whom the very nomenclature terrifies us. We give it up in despair: and so humbly take our leave of the New English Opera-house for the season!—“We had rather be taxed for silence, than checked for speech.”

At the other house, to which we “do more favourably incline,” both from old associations and immediate liking, though there are some raw recruits (picked up we don’t know where), there is a large and powerful detachment from the veteran corps of Covent Garden; Terry, Jones, Mrs. Gibbs, Liston, Mr. and Mrs. Charles Kemble, J. Russel, Farley, and Mrs. Mardyn and Madame Vestris from Drury Lane, and last, Miss R. Corri, from the Opera House.—In fact, it is our opinion that there is theatrical strength enough in this town only to set up one good summer or one good winter theatre. Competition may be necessary to prevent negligence and abuse, but the result of this distribution of the *corps dramatique* into different companies is, that we never, or very rarely indeed, see a play well acted in all its parts. At Drury Lane there is only one tragic

actor, Mr. Kean : all the rest are supernumeraries. At Covent-Garden they lately had one great tragic actress; Miss O'Neill ; and two or three actors who were highly respectable, at least in second-rate tragic characters. At present, the female throne in tragedy is vacant ; and of the men "who rant and fret their hour upon the stage," Mr. Macready is the only one who draws houses, or who finds admirers. He shines most, however, in the pathos of domestic life ; and we still want to see tragedy, "turreted, crowned, and crested, with its front gilt and blood-stained," stooping from the skies (not raised from the earth) as it did in the person of John Kemble. He is now quaffing health and burgundy in the south of France. He perhaps finds the air that blows from the "vine-covered hills" wholesomer than that of a crowded house ; and the lengthened murmurs of the Mediterranean shore more soothing to the soul than the deep thunders of the pit. Or does he sometimes recline his lofty, laurelled head upon the sea-beat beach, and unlocking the cells of memory, listen to the rolling Paeans, the loud never-to-be-forgotten plaudits of enraptured multitudes, that mingle with the music of the waves,

And murmur as the ocean murmurs near ?

Or does he still "sigh his soul towards England "

and the busy hum of Covent Garden ? If we thought so (but that we dread all returns from Elba), we would say to him, "Come back, and once more bid Britannia rival old Greece and Rome!"—Or where is Mr. Young now ? There is an opening for *his* pretensions too.—If the Drury Lane company are deficient in genteel comedy, we fear that Covent Garden cannot help them out in this respect. Mr. W. Farren is the only exception to the sweeping clause we were going to insert against them. He plays the old gentleman, the antiquated beau of the last age, very much after the fashion that we remember to have seen in our younger days, and that is quite a singular excellence in this. Is it that Mr. Farren has caught glimpses of this character in real life, hovering in the horizon of the sister kingdom, which has been long banished from this ? They have their Castle Rack-rents, their moats and ditches still extant in remote parts of the interior : and perhaps in famed Dublin city, the *chevaux-de-frise* of dress, the trellis-work of lace and ruffles, the masked battery of compliment, the port-cullises of formal speech, the whole artillery of sighs and ogling, with all the appendages and proper costume of the ancient regime, and paraphernalia of the *preux chevalier*, may have been kept up in a state of lively decrepitude and smiling dilapidation, in a few straggling

instances from the last century, which Mr. Farren had seen. The present age produces nothing of the sort ; and so, according to our theory, Mr. Farren does not play the young gentleman or modern man of fashion, though he is himself a young man. For the rest, comedy is in a rich, thriving state at Covent Garden, as far as the lower kind of comic humour is concerned ; but it is like an ill-baked pudding, where all the plums sink to the bottom. Emery and Liston, the two best, are of this description : Jones is a caricaturist ; and Terry, in his graver parts, is not a comedian, but a moralist.—Even a junction of the two companies into one would hardly furnish out one set of players competent to do justice to any of the standard productions of the English stage in tragedy or comedy ; what a hopeful project it must be then to start a few more play-houses in the heart of the metropolis as nurseries of histrionic talent, still more to divide and dissipate what little concentration of genius we have, and still more to weaken and distract public patronage ? As to the argument in favour of two or more theatres from the necessity of competition, we shall not dispute it ; but the actual benefits are not so visible to our dim eyes as to some others. There is a competition in what is bad as well as in what is good : the race of popularity is as often gained by tripping up the heels of your antag-

onist, as by pressing forward yourself: there is a competition in running an indifferent piece, or a piece indifferently acted, to prevent the success of the same piece at the other house; and there is a competition in puffing, as Mr. Elliston can witness—No, there, we confess, he leaves all competition behind!

The two pleasantest pieces we have seen this season at the Haymarket are the Green Man, and Pigeons and Crows. They were both to us an Agreeable Surprise; for we had not seen them when they were brought out last year, or the year before. The first is moral and pointed; the latter more lively and quaint. The Green Man abounds in laconic good sense: in Pigeons and Crows there is as edifying a vein of nonsense. We do not know the author of this last piece (to whom we confess ourselves obliged for two mirthful, thoughtless evenings), but we understand that the Green Man is adapted by Mr. Jones from a French *petite pièce*, which was itself taken from a German novel, we believe one of Kotzebue's. The sentiments indeed are evidently of that romantic, levelling cast, which formerly abounded in the writings of the *ci-devant* philanthropic enthusiast. The principal character in it is that of the Green Man himself, who is a benevolent, blunt-spoken, friendly cynic. The only joke of the character consists in his being dressed all in green—he has a green

coat, a green waistcoat and breeches, green stockings, a green hat, a green pocket handkerchief, and a green watch. This gives rise to many pleasant allusions ; and indeed, from the manner in which the peculiarity of his personal appearance affects our notion of his personal identity, he looks like a talking suit of clothes, a sermonizing and sententious vegetable. Mr. Terry performs the part admirably, and seems himself transformed into “a brother of the groves.” He does not aggravate the author’s meaning too much, but gives just as much point as was intended, and passes on to what comes next, as naturally, and with that sort of manner and unconscious interest which a man really takes in his own, or other people’s affairs. Mr. Terry’s acting always shows vigour and good sense. His only fault is, that he is too jealous of himself, and strives to do better than well. In the Green Man he was quite at home, and quite at his ease ; and made every one else feel equally so. Mr. Jones is an overstarched French fop in this play, full of foreign grimace and affectation, of which, however, he is cured by his passion for the fair ward of the Green Man (Miss Leigh, a very pleasing new actress), who does not at all tolerate such impertinence, and he afterwards turns out (*dandyism apart*) a very good sort of a humane character. Perhaps, enough has never been made, on

the stage of the frequent contradiction in this respect between outside appearances and sterling qualities within. We carry our prejudices both for and against dress too far. It is no rule either way. A fop is not necessarily a fool, nor without feeling. A man may even wear stays, and not be effeminate ; or a pink coat, without making his friends blush for him. The celebrated beau Hervey threw the scavenger that ridiculed him into his own mud-cart ; and a person in our own time, who has carried extravagance of dress and appearance to a very great pitch indeed, is, in reality, a very good-natured, sensible, modest man. The fault, in such cases, is neither in the head nor heart, but in the cut of a coat-collar, or the size of a pair of whiskers.—Farley and J. Russel were Major Dumpling and Captain Bibber in the same piece : and a scene of high farce they made of it. The one is an officer in the army—the *local militia*; the other is an officer in the navy. The one excels in eating, the other in drinking. The one is most at home in the kitchen, the other in the cellar. The one is fat, huge, and unwieldy ; the other, dapper, tight, and bustling. Farley is an actor with whose merit, in such parts, the public are well acquainted : Russel is one who will be liked more, the more he is known. In Captain Bibber, Blondeau, the French showman in Pigeons and Crows,

and in Silvester Daggerwood, he has acquitted himself with great applause, and entered into the humour, eccentricity, and peculiar distinctions of his characters, with spirit and fidelity. His mimicry is also good, and he sings a French rondeau, or a sailor's ditty, *con amore*. The part of Major Dummpling was originally played by Mr. Tokely. It was one of three parts (Crockery and Peter Pastoral were the other two) for which he seemed born, and having rolled himself up in them, like the silk-worm, he died. Poor Tokely! He relished his parts; with Crockery doated over an old sign-post, or wept with honest Peter over a green leaf.

His tears were tears of oil and gladness.

But he also relished his morning's draught, and sipped the sweets till he was drowned in a butt of whiskey. The said fair-looking, round-faced, pot-bellied, uncouth, awkward, out-of-the-way, unmeaning, inimitable Crockery, or Peter Pastoral, or Major Dummpling, was the very little child that, in the year 1796, Kemble used to carry off triumphantly on his arm in the original performance of Pizarro! Thinking of these things, may we not say, *sic transit gloria mundi*? So flies the stage away, and life flies after it as fast!—Mrs. Gibbs, “that horse-whipping woman,” in Teasing made Easy, does not, however,

wear the willow on his account, but looks as smiling, as good-humoured, as buxom, as in the natural and professional life-time of Mr. Tokely, and drinks her bowl of cream as Cowslip, and expresses her liking of a roast duck with the same resignation of flesh and spirit as ever.

Mr. Liston, in *Pigeons and Crows*, plays the part of Sir Peter Pigwiggin, knight, alderman, and pin-maker. What a name, what a person, and what a representative! We never saw Mr. Liston's countenance in better preservation ; that is, it seems tumbling all in pieces with indescribable emotions, and a thousand odd twitches and unaccountable absurdities oozing out at every pore. His jaws seem to ache with laughter : his eyes look out of his head with wonder : his face is unctuous all over and bathed with jests ; the tip of his nose is tickled with conceit of himself, and his teeth chatter in his head in the eager insinuation of a plot : his forehead speaks, and his wig (not every particular hair, but the whole bewildered bushy mass) "stands on end as life were in it." In the scene with his dulcinea (Miss Leigh) his approaches are the height of self-complacent, *cockney* courtship ; his rhymes on his own projected marriage,

What a thing !
Bless the King !

would make any man (who is not so already) loyal ; and his laughing in the glass when he is told by mistake that Miss's mamma is eighteen, and his convulsive distortions as he recovers from his first surprise, and the choking effects of it, out-Hogarth Hogarth !

Let those laugh now who never laughed before,
And those who still have laugh'd, now laugh the more.

The scene where he is told he is poisoned, and his interview with the drunken apothecary (Mr. Williams), though excellent in themselves, were not so good : for Liston does not play so well to any one else as he does to himself. The rest of the characters were well supported. Jones, as the younger Pigwiggin, *alias* Captain Neville, the lover of Liston's fair inamorata, "does a little bit of fidgets" very well. He is sprightly, voluble, knowing, and pleasant ; and is the life of a small theatre, only that he is now and then a little too obstreperous ; but he keeps up the interest of his part, and that is every thing. The audience delight to hear his "View Halloo" before he comes on the stage (which is a sure sign of their opinion), and expect to be amused for the next ten minutes. If an actor can excite hope, and not disappoint it, what can he do more ? Mr. Russell as the little French showman, Mr. Farley as Mr. Wadd,

and Mr. Connor as a blundering Irish servant, all sustained their parts with great *éclat*: and so did the ladies. The scene where Jones deceives two of his creditors, Russell and Farley, by appointing each to pay the other, had a very laughable effect; but the stratagem is borrowed from Congreve, who, indeed, was not the very worst source to borrow from.

MR. ELLISTON'S GASCONADES—THE VAMPYRE—PATENT THEATRES.*

THE following is a play-bill of Drury Lane theatre, for which we paid two-pence on the spot, to verify the fact—as some well-disposed persons, to prevent mistakes, purchase libellous or blasphemous publications from their necessitous or desperate vendors.

Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.—Agreeably to the former advertisement, this theatre is now open for the last performances of Mr. Kean, before his positive departure for America. This evening, Saturday, August 19, 1820, his Majesty's servants will perform Shakespear's tragedy of Othello. Duke of Venice, Mr. Thompson ; Brabantio, Mr. Powell ; Gratiano, Mr. Carr ; Lodovico, Mr. Vining ; Montano, Mr. Jeffries ; Othello, Mr. Kean—(his last appearance in that character) ; Cassio, Mr. Bromley—(his first appearance in that character) ; Roderigo, Mr. Russell ; Iago, Junius Brutus Booth ; Leonardo, Mr. Hudson ; Julio, Mr. Raymond ; Manco, Mr. Moreton ; Paulo, Mr. Read ; Giovanni, Mr. Starmer ; Luca, Mr. Randall ; Desdemona, Mrs. W. West ; Emilia, Mrs. Egerton.—This theatre overflows every night. The patentees cannot condescend to enter into a competition of scurrility, which is only fitted for minor theatres—what their powers really are, will be, without any public appeal, legally decided in November next, and any

gasconade can only be supposed to be caused by cunning or poverty.—After which, the farce of 'Modern Antiques, &c.

A more impudent puff, and heartless piece of bravado than this, we do not remember to have witnessed. *This theatre does not overflow every night.* As to the competition of scurrility, which the manager declines, it is he who has commenced it. The minor theatres—that is, one of them—to wit, the Lyceum—put forth a very proper and well-grounded remonstrance against this portentous opening of the winter theatre in the middle of the dog-days, to scorch up the dry, meagre, hasty harvest of the summer ones : —at which our mighty manager sets up his back, like the great cat, Rodilardus ; scornfully rejects their appeal to the public ; says he will pounce upon them in November with the law in his hands ; and that, in the mean time, all they can do to interest the public in their favour by a plain statement of facts, “can only be supposed to be caused by *cunning or poverty.*” This is pretty well for a manager who has been so *thanked* as Mr. Elliston ! His own committee may laud him for bullying other theatres, but the public will have a feeling for his weaker rivals, though the angry comedian “should threaten to swallow them up quick,” and vaunt of his action of battery against them, without any public appeal, “when wind and rain beat dark November.” This sorry manager,

"dressed" (to use the words of the immortal bard, whom he so modestly and liberally patronises) "dressed in a little brief authority, plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven,"—not "as make the angels weep,"—but his own candle-snuffers laugh, and his own scene-shifters blush. He ought to be ashamed of himself. Why, what a beggarly account of wretched actors, what an exposure of the nakedness of the land, have we in this very play-bill, which is issued forth with such a mixture of pomp and imbecility! Mr. Kean's name, indeed, stands pre-eminent in lordly capitals, in defiance of Mr. Dowton's resentment,—and Junius Brutus Booth, in his way, scorns to be *Mistered*! But all the rest are, we suppose—Mr. Elliston's friends. They are happy in the favour of the manager, and in the total ignorance of the town! Mr. Kean, we grant, is in himself a host; a sturdy column, supporting the tottering, tragic dome of Drury Lane! What will it be when this main, this sole striking pillar is taken away—"You take my house, when you do take the prop that holds my house"—when the patentees shall have nothing to look to for salvation but the puffing of the Great Lessee, and his genius for law, which we grant may rival the Widow Black-acre's—and when the cries of Othello, of Macbeth, of Richard, and Sir Giles, in the last agonies of their

despair, shall be lost, through all the long winter months, "over a vast and unhearing ocean?" Mr. Elliston, instead of taking so much pains to announce his own approaching dissolution, had better let Mr. Kean pass in silence, and take his *positive departure for America* without the pasting of placards, and the dust and clatter of a law-suit in Westminster Hall. It is not becoming in him, W. R. Elliston, Esq., comedian, formerly proprietor of the Surrey and the Olympic, and author of a pamphlet on the unwarrantable encroachments of the Theatres-royal, now to insult over the plea of self-defence and self-preservation, set up by his brethren of the minor play-houses, as the resource of "poverty and cunning!"—It is not friendly, it is not gentlemanly. The profession, as well as Mr. Arnold, may blame him for it: but the patentees will no doubt thank him at their next quarterly meeting.

THE VAMPYRE.

THE new Dramatic Romance (or whatever it is called) of the Vampyre is, upon the whole, the most splendid *spectacle* we have ever seen. It is taken from a French piece, founded on the celebrated story

so long bandied about between Lord Byron, Mr. Shelley, and Dr. Polidori, which last turned out to be the true author. As a mere fiction, and as a fiction attributed to Lord Byron, whose genius is chartered for the land of horrors, the original story passed well enough: but on the stage it is a little shocking to the feelings, and incongruous to the sense, to see a spirit in human shape,—in the shape of a real Earl, and, what is more, of a *Scotch* Earl—going about seeking whom it may marry and then devour, to lengthen out its own abhorred and anomalous being. Allowing for the preternatural atrocity of the fable, the situations were well imagined and supported: the acting of Mr. T. P. Cooke (from the Surrey Theatre) was spirited and imposing, and certainly Mrs. W. H. Chatterley, as the daughter of his friend the baron (Mr. Bartley), and his destined bride, bid fair to be a very delectable victim. She is, however, saved in a surprising manner, after a rapid succession of interesting events, to the great joy of the spectator. The scenery of this piece is its greatest charm, and it is inimitable. We have seen sparkling and overpowering effects of this kind before; but to the splendour of a transparency were here added all the harmony and mellowness of the finest painting. We do not speak of the vision at the beginning, or of that at the end of the piece,—

though these were admirably managed,—so much of the representation of the effects of moonlight on the water and on the person of the dying knight. The hue of the sea-green waves, floating in the pale beam under an arch-way of grey weather-beaten rocks, and with the light of a torch glaring over the milder radiance, was in as fine keeping and strict truth as Claude or Rembrandt, and would satisfy, we think, the most fastidious artist's eye. It lulled the sense of sight as the fancied sound of the dashing waters soothed the imagination. In the scene where the moonlight fell on the dying form of Ruthven (the Vampire) it was like a fairy glory, forming a palace of emerald light: the body seemed to drink its balmy essence, and to revive in it without a miracle. The line,

See how the moon sleeps with Endymion,
came into the mind from the beauty and gorgeousness
of the picture, notwithstanding the repugnance of every
circumstance and feeling.

PATENT THEATRES.

THE Manager of the English Opera House on Monday, 21st ult. brought out an occasional farce against the Manager of Drury-Lane, called Patent Seasons ; deprecating the encroachments of the winter theatres, and predicting that, in consequence, "the English Opera would soon be a Beggar's Opera." His hits at his overbearing rival were good, and *told* ; but the confession of the weakness and "poverty," which Mr. Elliston had thrown in his teeth, rather served to damp than excite the enthusiasm of the audience. Every one is inclined to run away from a falling house ; and of all appeals, that to humanity should be the last. The town may be bullied, ridiculed, wheedled, *puffed* out of their time and money, but to ask them to sink their patronage in a bankrupt concern, is to betray an ignorance of the world, who sympathise with the prosperous, and laugh at injustice. Generosity is the last infirmity of the public mind. Pity is a frail ground of popularity : and "misery doth part the flux of company." If you want the assistance of others, put a good face upon the matter, and conceal it from them that you want it. Do not whine and look piteous in their faces, or they will treat you like a dog. The 170 families

that Mr. Arnold tells us depend upon his minor theatre for support are not "Russian sufferers," nor sufferers in a triumphant cause. Talk of 170 distressed families dependent on a distressed manager (not an autocrat of one vast theatre), and the sound hangs like a mill-stone on the imagination, "a load to sink a navy." The audience slink away, one by one, willing to slip their necks out of it. *Charity is cold.*

EXPLANATIONS — CONVERSATION ON THE DRAMA WITH COLERIDGE.

“At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue ;
To-morrow to fresh fields and pastures new.”

WHY was not this No. XII. instead of No. XI. of the Acted Drama in London ? Had we but seen No. XII. at the head of our article for December, we had been happy, “as broad and casing as the general air, whole as the marble, founded as the rock,” but now we are “cooped and cabined in by saucy doubts and fears.” Had No. XI. been ready in time, we should have been irreproachable “in act and complement extern,” which is with us every thing. Punctuality is “the immediate jewel of our souls.” We leave it to others to be shrewd, ingenious, witty and wise ; to think deeply, and write finely ; it is enough for us to be exactly dull. The categories of *number* and *quantity* are what we chiefly delight in ; for on these depend (by arithmetical computation) the pounds, shillings, and pence. We suspect that

those writers only trouble their heads about fame, who cannot get any thing more substantial for what they write; and are in fact equally at a loss for "solid pudding or for empty praise." That is not the case with us. We have money in our purse, and reputation—to spare. Nothing troubles us but that our article on the drama was wanting for November—on this point we are inconsolable. No more delight in regularity—no more undisturbed complacency in the sense of arduous duty conscientiously discharged—no more confidence in meeting our Editors—no more implicit expectation of our monthly decisions on the part of the public! As the Italian poet for one error of the press, in a poem presented to the Pope, died of chagrin, so we for one deficiency in this series of Dramatic Criticisms (complete but for that) must resign! We have no other way left to appease our scrupulous sense of critical punctilio. That there was but one link wanting, is no matter—

Tenth or ten thousandth break the chain alike.

There was one Number (the eleventh) of the LONDON MAGAZINE, of which the curious reader turned over the pages with eager haste, and found no Drama—a thing never to be remedied! It was no fault of ours that it was so. A friend hath done this. The author of the Calendar of Nature (a pleasing and

punctual performance) has spoiled our Calendar of Art, and robbed us of that golden rigol of periodical praise, that we had in fancy "bound our brows withal." With the month our contribution to the stock of literary amusement and scientific intelligence returned without fail. In January, we gave an account of all the actors we had ever seen or heard of. In February, we confined ourselves to Miss O'Neill. In March, we expatiated at large on the Minor Theatres, and took great delight in the three Miss Dennetts. In April (being at Ilminster, a pretty town in the vale of Taunton, and thence passing on to the Lamb at Hindon, a dreary spot,) we proved at these two places, sitting in an arm-chair by a sea-coal fire, very satisfactorily, and without fear of contradiction,—neither Mr. Maturin, Mr. Shiel, nor Mr. Milman being present,—that no modern author could write a tragedy. In May, we wrote an article which filled the proper number of columns, though we forget what it was about. In June, we discoursed of Kean as Harlequin, and in July we had to show that a modern author had written a tragedy (*Virginius*)—an opinion, which, though it overset our theory, we are by no means desirous to retract. We still say, that that play is better than Bertram, though Mr. Maturin says it is not. As in June we were not dry, neither in July were we

droughty. We found something to say in this and in August, without being much indebted to the actors or actresses, though, if Miss Tree came out in either of those months, we ought to recollect it, and mark the event with *a white stone*. We had rather hear her sing in ordinary cases than Miss Stevens, though not in extraordinary ones. By the bye, when will that little pouting slut, with crystalline eyes and voice, return to us from the sister island? In July, too, we had a skirmish with the facetious and biting Janus, of versatile memory, on his assumed superiority in dramatic taste and skill, when we corrected him for his contempt of court—and of the Miss Dennetts, our wards in criticism. In September we called Mr. Elliston to task for taking, in his vocation of manager, improper liberties with the public. In October we got an able article written for us; for we flatter ourselves, that we not only say good things ourselves, but are the cause of them in others. But in November (may that dark month stand aye accursed in the Calendar!) we failed, and failed, as how? Our friend, the ingenious writer aforesaid (one of the most ingenious and sharp-witted men of his age, but not so remarkable for the virtue of *reliability* as Mr. Coleridge's friend, the poet-laureate,) was to take a mutton-chop with us, and afterwards we were to go to the play, and club our forces in a

criticism—but he never came, *we* never went to the play (the Stranger, with Charles Kemble as the hero, and a new Mrs. Haller)—and the criticism was never written. The Drama of the LONDON MAGAZINE for that month is left a blank!—We were in hopes that our other contributors might have been proportionably on the alert; but, on the contrary, we were sorry to hear it remarked by more than one person, that the Magazine for November was, on the whole, dull.

If theatrical criticisms were only written when there is something worth writing about, it would be hard upon us who live by them. Are we not to receive our quarter's salary (like Mr. Croker in the piping time of peace) because Mrs. Siddons has left the stage, and “has not left her peer?” or because John Kemble will not return to it with renewed health and vigour, to prop a falling house, and falling art? or because Mr. Kean has gone to America? or because Mr. Wallack has arrived from that country? No; the duller the stage grows, the gayer and more edifying must we become in ourselves: the less we have to say about that, the more room we have to talk about other things. Now would be the time for Mr. Coleridge to turn his talents to account, and write for the stage, when there is no topic to confine his pen, or “constrain his genius by mastery.” “With mighty wings outspread, his

imagination might brood over the void and make it pregnant." Under the assumed head of the Drama, he might unfold the whole mysteries of Swedenborg, or ascend the third heaven of invention with Jacob Behmen : he might write a treatise on all the unknown sciences, and finish the *Encyclopedia Metropolitana* in a pocket form :—nay, he might bring to a satisfactory close his own dissertation on the difference between the Imagination and the Fancy,* before, in all probability, another great actor appears, or another tragedy or comedy is written. He is the man of all others to swim on empty bladders in a sea, without shore or soundings : to drive an empty stage-coach without passengers or lading, and arrive behind his time ; to write marginal notes without a text ; to look into a millstone to foster the rising genius of the age ; to "see merit in the chaos of its elements, and discern perfection in the great obscurity of nothing," as his most favourite author, Sir Thomas Brown, has it on another occasion. Alas ! we have no such creative talents : we cannot amplify, expand, raise our flimsy discourse, as the gaseous matter fills and lifts the round, glittering, slow-sailing balloon, to "the up-turned eyes of wondering mortals."

* The Fancy is not used here in the sense of Mr. Peter Corcoran, but in a sense peculiar to Mr. Coleridge, and hitherto undefined by him.

Here is our bill of fare for the month, or list of memoranda — *The French dancers*—*Farren's Deaf Lover*—*Macready's Zanga*—*Mr. Cooper's Romeo. A new farce, not acted a second time*—*Wallace, a tragedy*,—and *Mr. Wallack's Hamlet*. Who can make any thing of such a beggarly account as this? Not we. Yet as poets at a pinch invoke the Muse, so we, for once, will invoke Mr. Coleridge's better genius, and thus we hear him talk, diverting our attention from the players and the play.

“The French, my dear Hazlitt,” would he begin, “are not a people of imagination. They have so little, that you cannot persuade them to conceive it possible that they have none. They have no poetry, no such thing as genius, from the age of Louis XIV. It was that, their boasted Augustan age, which stamped them French, which put the seal upon their character, and from that time nothing has grown up original, or luxuriant, or spontaneous among them; the whole has been cast in a mould, and that a bad one. Montaigne and Rabelais (their two greatest men, the one for thought, and the other for imaginative humour,—for the distinction between imagination and fancy holds in ludicrous as well as serious composition) I consider as Franks rather than Frenchmen, for in their time the national literature was not *set*, was neither mounted on stilts, nor buck-

ramed in stays. Wit they had, too, if I could persuade myself that Molière was a genuine Frenchman ; but I cannot help suspecting that his mother played his reputed father false, and that an Englishman begot him. I am sure his genius is English, and his wit not of the Parisian cut. As a proof of this, see how his most extravagant farces, the Mock-doctor, Barnaby Brittle, &c. take with us. What can be more to the taste of our *bourgeoisie*, more adapted to our native tooth, than his Country Wife, which Wycherly did little else than translate into English ? What success a translator of Racine into our vernacular tongue would meet with, I leave you to guess. His tragedies are not poetry, are not passion, are not imagination : they are a parcel of set speeches, of epigrammatic conceits, of declamatory phrases, without any of the glow, and glancing rapidity, and principle of fusion in the mind of the poet, to agglomerate them into grandeur, or blend them into harmony. The principle of the imagination resembles the emblem of the serpent, by which the ancients typified wisdom and the universe, with undulating folds, for ever varying and for ever flowing into itself,—circular, and without beginning or end. The definite, the fixed, is death : the principle of life is the indefinite, the growing, the moving, the continuous. But every thing in French poetry is cut

up into shreds and patches, little flowers of poetry, with tickets and labels to them, as when the daughters of Jason minced and hacked their old father into collops—we have the *disjecta membra poetæ*—not the entire and living man. The spirit of genuine poetry should inform the whole work, should breathe through, and move, and agitate the complete mass, as the soul informs and moves the limbs of a man, or as the vital principle (whatever it be) permeates the veins of the loftiest trees, building up the trunk, and extending the branches to the sun and winds of heaven, and shooting out into fruit and flowers. This is the progress of nature and of genius. This is the true poetic faculty, or that which the Greeks literally call *ωνητικός*. But a French play (I think it is Schlegel who somewhere makes the comparison, though I had myself, before I ever read Schlegel, made the same remark) is like a child's garden set with slips of branches and flowers, stuck in the ground, not growing in it. We may weave a gaudy garland in this manner, but it withers in an hour: while the products of genius and nature give out their odours to the gale, and spread their tints in the sun's eye, age after age—

Outlast a thousand storms, a thousand winters,
Free from the Sirian star and thunder stroke,
and flourish in immortal youth and beauty. Every

thing French is frittered into parts: every thing is therefore dead and ineffective. French poetry is just like chopped logic: nothing comes of it. There is no life of mind: neither the birth nor generation of knowledge. It is all patch-work, all sharp points and angles, all superficial. They receive, and give out sensation, too readily for it ever to amount to a sentiment. They cannot even dance, as you may see. There is, I am sure you will agree, no expression, no grace in their dancing. Littleness, point, is what damns them in all they do. With all their vivacity and animal spirits, they dance not like men and women under the impression of certain emotions, but like puppets; they twirl round like *tourniquets*. Not to feel, and not to think, is all they know of this art or of any other. You might swear that a nation that danced in that manner would never produce a true poet or philosopher. They have it not in them. There is not the principle of cause and effect. They make a sudden turn because there is no reason for it: they stop short, or move fast, only because you expect something else. Their style of dancing is difficult: would it were impossible."* (By this time several persons in the pit had turned round to listen

* This expression is borrowed from Dr. Johnson. However, as Dr. Johnson is not a German critic, Mr. C. need not be supposed to acknowledge it.

to this uninterrupted discourse, and our eloquent friend went on, rather raising his voice with a *Paulo majora canamus.*) "Look at that Mademoiselle Milanie with 'the foot of fire,' as she is called. You might contrive a paste-board figure, with the help of strings or wires, to do all, and more, than she does—to point the toe, to raise the leg, to jerk the body, to run like wild-fire. Antics are not grace : to dance is not to move against time. My dear Hazlitt, if you could have seen a dance by some Italian peasant-girls in the Campagna of Rome, as I have, I am sure your good taste and good sense would have approved it. They came forward slow and smiling, but as if their limbs were steeped in luxury, and every motion seemed an echo of the music, and the heavens looked on serener as they trod. You are right about the Miss Dennetts, though you have all the cant-phrases against you. It is true, they break down in some of their steps, but it is like 'the lily drooping on its stalk green,' or like 'the flowers Proserpina let fall from Dis's waggon.' Those who cannot see grace in the youth and inexperience of these charming girls, would see no beauty in a cluster of hyacinths, bent with the morning dew. To shew at once what is, and is not French, there is Mademoiselle Hullin, she is Dutch. Nay, she is just like a Dutch doll, as round-faced, as rosy, and looks for all the world as if her limbs were

made of wax-work, and would take in pieces, but not as if she could move them of her own accord. Alas, poor tender thing! As to the men, I confess" (this was said to me in an audible whisper, lest it might be construed into a breach of confidence) "I should like, as Southey says, to have them *hamstrung!*"—(At this moment Monsieur Hullin *Père* looked as if this charitable operation was about to be performed on him by an extra-official warrant from the poet-laureate.)

"Pray, Hazlitt, have you seen Macready's *Zanga*?"

"Yes."

"And what do you think of it?"

"I did not like it much."

"Nor I. Macready has talents and a magnificent voice, but he is, I fear, too improving an actor to be a man of genius. That little ill-looking vagabond Kean never improved in any thing. In some things he could not, and in others he would not. The only parts of Macready's *Zanga* that I liked (which of course I only half-liked) were some things in imitation of the *extremely natural manner* of Kean, and his address to Alonzo, urging him, as the greatest triumph of his self-denial, to sacrifice

A wife, a bride, a mistress unenjoyed—

where his voice rose exulting on the sentiment, like

the thunder that clothes the neck of the war-horse. The person that pleased me most in this play was Mrs. Sterling : she did justice to her part—a thing not easy to do. I like Macready's Wallace better than his Zanga, though the play is not a good one, and it is difficult for the actor to find out the author's meaning. I would not judge harshly of a first attempt, but the faults of youthful genius are exuberance, and a continual desire of novelty ; now the faults of this play are tameness, common-place, and clap-traps. It is said to be written by young Walker, the son of the Westminster orator. If so, his friend, Mr. Cobbett, will probably write a Theatrical Examiner of it in his next week's Political Register. What, I would ask, can be worse, more out of character and costume, than to make Wallace drop his sword to have his throat cut by Menteith, merely because the latter has proved himself (what he suspected) a traitor and a villain, and then console himself for this voluntary martyrdom by a sentimental farewell to the rocks and mountains of his native country! This effeminate softness and wretched cant did not belong to the age, the country, or the hero. In this scene, however, Mr. Macready shone much : and in the attitude in which he stood after letting his sword fall, he displayed extreme grace and feeling. It was as if he had let his best friend, his

trusty sword, drop like a serpent from his hand. Macready's figure is awkward, but his attitudes are graceful and well composed.—Don't you think so?"—

I answered, yes; and he then ran on in his usual manner, by inquiring into the metaphysical distinction between the grace of form and the grace that arises from motion (as, for instance, you may move a square form in a circular or waving line), and illustrated this subtle observation at great length and with much happiness. He asked me how it was, that Mr. Farren, in the farce of the Deaf Lover, played the old gentleman so well, and failed so entirely in the young gallant? I said I could not tell. He then tried at a solution himself, in which I could not follow him so as to give the precise point of his argument. He afterwards defined to me, and those about us, the merits of Mr. Cooper and Mr. Wallack, classing the first as a respectable, and the last as a second-rate actor, with large grounds and learned definitions of his meaning on both points; and, as the lights were by this time nearly out, and the audience (except his immediate auditors) going away, he reluctantly "ended,"

But in Adam's ear so pleasing left his voice,
that I quite forgot I had to write my article on the

Drama the next day ; nor without his aid should I have been able to wind up my accounts for the year, as Mr. Mathews gets through his AT HOME by the help of a little awkward ventriloquism.

MR. KEAN'S PERFORMANCES.

SHYLOCK.

MR. KEAN made his appearance * at Drury Lane Theatre in the character of Shylock. For eye, action, and expression, no actor has come out for many years at all equal to him. The applause, from the first scene to the last, was general, loud, and uninterrupted. Indeed, the very first scene, in which he comes on with Bassanio and Antonio, shewed the master in his art, and at once decided the opinion of the audience. Perhaps it was the most perfect of any. Notwithstanding the complete success of Mr. Kean in the part of Shylock, we question whether he will not become a greater favourite in other parts. (There was a lightness and a vigour in his tread, a buoyancy and elasticity of spirit, a fire and animation, which would accord better with almost any other character than with the morose, sullen, inward, inveterate, inflexible malignity of Shylock.) The character of Shylock is that of a man brooding over one idea, that of its wrongs, and bent on one unalterable

* January 27, 1814.

*An exhibition of
Shylock's rabid expression,
to the actor's expression.*

*Left at my constant
time, Jan 1814.*

purpose, that of revenge. In conveying a profound impression of this feeling, or in embodying the general conception of rigid and uncontrollable self-will, equally proof against every sentiment of humanity or prejudice of opinion, we have seen actors more successful than Mr. Kean; (but in giving effect to the conflict of passions arising out of the contrasts of situation, in varied vehemence of declamation, in keenness of sarcasm, in the rapidity of his transitions from one tone and feeling to another, in propriety and novelty of action, presenting a succession of striking pictures, and giving perpetually fresh shocks of delight and surprise, it would be difficult to single out a competitor.) The fault of his acting was (if we may hazard the objection) an over-display of the resources of the art, which gave too much relief to the hard, impenetrable, dark ground-work of the character of Shylock. It would be endless to point out individual beauties, where almost every passage was received with equal and deserved applause. We thought, in one or two instances, the pauses in the voice were too long, and too great a reliance placed on the expression of the countenance, which is a language intelligible only to a part of the house.

Mr. Kean appeared again * in Shylock, and, by

* February 2, 1814.

his admirable and expressive manner of giving the part, fully sustained the reputation he had acquired by his former representation of it. He assumed a greater appearance of age and feebleness than on the first night, but the general merit of his playing was the same. His style of acting is, if we may use the expression, more significant, more pregnant with meaning, more varied and alive in every part, than any we have almost ever witnessed. The character never stands still ; there is no vacant pause in the action ; the eye is never silent. For depth and force of conception, we have seen actors whom we should prefer to Mr. Kean in Shylock ; for brilliant and masterly execution, none. It is not saying too much of him, though it is saying a great deal, that he has all that Mr. Kemble *wants* of perfection. He reminds us of the descriptions of the "far-darting eye" of Garrick. We are anxious to see him in Norval and Richard, and anticipate more complete satisfaction from his performance of the latter part, than from the one in which he has already stamped his reputation with the public.

MR. KEAN'S ACCIDENT.

A chasm has been produced in the amusements of Drury Lane Theatre by an accident to Mr. Kean. He was to have played the Duke of Milan on Tuesday,* but

* March 30, 1816.

as he had not come to the theatre at the time of the drawing up of the curtain, and no tidings were heard of him, he was given up, and two farces substituted in his stead. Conjectures and rumours were afloat ; and it was not till the next day that it was discovered that Mr. Kean having dined a few miles in the country, and returning at a very quick pace to keep his engagement at the theatre, was thrown out of his gig, and had his arm dislocated, besides being stunned and very much bruised with the fall. On this accident a grave morning paper is pleased to be facetious. It observes that this is a very *serious* accident ; that actors in general are liable to *serious* accidents ; that the late Mr. Cooke used to meet with *serious* accidents ; that it is a sad thing to be in the way of such accidents ; and that it is to be hoped that Mr. Kean will meet with no more *serious* accidents. It is to be hoped that he will not—nor with any such profound observations upon them, if they should happen. Next to that spirit of bigotry, which, in a neighbouring country, would deny actors Christian burial after death, we hate that cant of criticism, which slurs over their characters while living with a half-witted jest. The insinuation here made is wholly unfounded. We have it on very good authority, that Mr. Kean, since his engagement at Drury Lane, and during his arduous and uninter-

rupted exertions in his profession, has never missed a single rehearsal, nor been absent a minute beyond the time for beginning his part.

SHYLOCK.

MR. KEAN made his first appearance after his recovery from his accident* On his coming on the stage there was a loud burst of applause and welcome; but as this was mixed with some hisses, Mr. Kean came forward, and spoke nearly as follows:

"Ladies and Gentlemen, for the first time in my life I have been the unfortunate cause of disappointing the public amusement.

"That it is the only time on these boards, I can appeal to your own recollection; and when you take into calculation the 265 times that I have had the honour to appear before you, according to the testimony of the Managers' books, you will, perhaps, be able to make some allowance.

"To your favour I owe all the reputation I enjoy.

"I rely on your candour, that prejudice shall not rob me of what your kindness has conferred upon me."

Upon a former occasion we expressed an overstrained idea of the gloomy character of Shylock, more from seeing other players perform it] than from the text of Shakspeare. Mr. Kean's manner is much nearer the mark. Shakspeare could not easily divest his characters of their entire humanity :

* April 6, 1816.

his Jew is more than half a Christian. Certainly, our sympathies are much oftener with him than with his enemies. He is honest in his vices; they are hypocrites in their virtues. In all his arguments and replies he has the advantage over them, by taking them on their own ground. Shylock (however some persons may suppose him bowed down by age, or deformed with malignity) never, that we can find, loses his elasticity and presence of mind. There is wonderful grace and ease in all the speeches in this play. The character of Shylock is another instance of Shakspeare's power of identifying himself with the thoughts of men, their prejudices, and almost instincts.

RICHARD III.*

MR. KEAN's manner of acting this part has one peculiar advantage—it is entirely his own, without any traces of imitation of any other actor. He stands upon his own ground, and he stands firm upon it. Almost every scene had the stamp and freshness of nature. The excellences and defects of his performance were in general the same as those which he discovered in Shylock; though as the character of Richard is the most difficult, so we

* February 15, 1814.

think he displayed most power in it. It is possible to form a higher conception of this character (we do not mean from seeing other actors, but from reading Shakspeare) than that given by this very admirable tragedian ; but we cannot imagine any character represented with greater distinctness and precision, more perfectly articulated in every part. Perhaps, indeed, there is too much of this ; for we sometimes thought he failed, even from an exuberance of talent, and dissipated the impression of the character by the variety of his resources. To be perfect, it should have a little more solidity, depth, sustained and impassioned feeling, with somewhat less brilliancy, with fewer glancing lights, pointed transitions, and pantomimic evolutions.

If Mr. Kean does not completely succeed in concentrating all the lines of the character, as drawn by Shakspeare, he gives an animation, vigour, and relief to the part, which we have never seen surpassed. He is more refined than Cooke ; more bold, varied, and original than Kemble, in the same character. In some parts, however, we thought him deficient in dignity ; and particularly in the scenes of state business, there was not a sufficient air of artificial authority. The fine assumption of condescending superiority, after he is made king—"Stand all apart,—Cousin of Buckingham," &c. was not given with the

effect which it might have received. There was also, at times, a sort of tip-toe elevation, an enthusiastic rapture in his expectations of obtaining the crown, instead of a gloating expression of sullen delight, as if he already clutched the bauble, and held it within his grasp. This was the precise expression which Mr. Kean gave with so much effect to the part where he says, that he already feels

“The golden rigol bind his brows,”

In one who *dares* so much, there is little indeed to blame. The only two things which appeared to us decidedly objectionable, were the sudden letting down of his voice when he says of Hastings, “Chop off his head,” and the action of putting his hands behind him, in listening to Buckingham’s account of his reception by the citizens. His courtship scene with Lady Anne was an admirable exhibition of smooth and smiling villainy. The progress of wily adulation, of encroaching humility, was finely marked throughout by the action, voice, and eye. He seemed, like the first tempter, to approach his prey certain of the event, and as if success had smoothed the way before him. We remember Mr. Cooke’s manner of representing this scene was more violent, hurried, and full of anxious uncertainty. This, though more natural in general, was, we think, less in character. Richard

should woo not as a lover, but as an actor—to shew his mental superiority and power to make others the playthings of his will. Mr. Kean's attitude in leaning against the side of the stage before he comes forward in this scene, was one of the most graceful and striking we remember to have seen. It would have done for Titian to paint. The opening scene, in which Richard descants on his own deformity, was conceived with perfect truth and character, and delivered in a fine and varied tone of natural recitation. Mr. Kean did equal justice to the beautiful description of the camps the night before the battle, though, in consequence of his hoarseness, he was obliged to repeat the whole passage in an under-key. His manner of bidding his friends good night, and his pausing with the point of his sword drawn slowly backward and forward on the ground, before he retires to his tent, received shouts of applause. He gave to all the busy scenes of the play the greatest animation and effect. He filled every part of the stage. The concluding scene, in which he is killed by Richmond, was the most brilliant. He fought like one drunk with wounds: and the attitude in which he stands with his hands stretched out, after his sword is taken from him, had a preternatural and terrific grandeur, as if his will could not be dis-

armed, and the very phantoms of his despair had a withering power.

The house was crowded at an early hour in every part, to witness Mr. Kean's second representation of Richard.* His admirable acting received that meed of applause which it so well deserved. His voice had not entirely recovered its tone and strength; and when (after the curtain had dropped, amidst a tumult of approbation) Mr. Rae came forward to announce the play for Monday, cries of "No! no!" from every part of the house testified the sense entertained by the audience of the impropriety of requiring the repetition of this extraordinary effort, till every physical disadvantage had been completely removed.

We have little to add to our former remarks, for Mr. Kean went through the part nearly as before, and we saw no reason to alter our opinion. The dying scene was the most varied, and, we think, for the worse. In pronouncing the words in Richard's soliloquy, "I am myself alone," Mr. Kean gave a quick and hurried movement to his voice, as if it was a thought that suddenly struck him, or which he wished to pass over; whereas it is the deep and rooted sentiment of his breast. The reduplication of

February 21, 1814.

the words in Shakspeare points out the manner in which the voice should dwell upon, and, as it were, brood over the feeling, loth to part with the bitter consolation. Where he says to Buckingham, "I am not i' the vein," the expression should, we imagine, be that of stifled hatred and cold contempt, instead of sarcastic petulance. The scene tells for itself, without being pointed by the manner. In general, perhaps, if Mr. Kean were to give to the character less of the air of an ostentatious hypocrite, of an intelligible villain, it would be more correct, and would accord better with Shakspeare's idea of the part. The description which he has put into the mouth of Hastings is a perfect study for the actor.

" His grace looks cheerfully and smooth this morning :
There's some conceit or other likes him well,
When that he bids good-morrow with such spirit.
I think there's ne'er a man in Christendom
Can lesser hide his hate or love than he,
For by his face straight shall you know his heart."

In the scene with Lady Anne, in the sudden alteration of his manner to the messenger who brings him the news of Edward's illness—in the interview with Buckingham, where he desires the death of the children—in his infinitely spirited expostulation with Lord Stanley—in his triumph at the death of Buckingham—in the parting scene with his friends before

the battle—in his treatment of the paper sent to Norfolk—and in all the tumult and glowing interest of the last scenes of the play, we had fresh cause for admiration. It were in vain, however, to point out particular beauties ; for the research, the ingenuity, and the invention manifested throughout the character are endless. We have said before, and we still think so, that there is even too much effect given, too many significant hints, too much appearance of study. There is a tone in acting, as well as in painting, which is the chief and master excellence. Our highest conception of an actor is, that he shall assume the character once for all, and be it throughout, and trust to this conscious sympathy for the effect produced. Mr. Kean's manner of acting is, on the contrary, rather a perpetual assumption of his part, always brilliant and successful, almost always true and natural, but yet always a distinct effort in every new situation, so that the actor does not seem entirely to forget himself, or to be identified with the character. The extreme elaboration of the parts injures the broad and massy effect : the general impulse of the machine is retarded by the variety and intricacy of the movements. But why do we try this actor by an ideal theory? Who is there that will stand the same test? It is, in fact, the last forlorn hope of criticism, for it shews that we have

nothing else to compare him with. / “Take him for all in all,” it will be long, very long, before we “look upon his like again,” if we are to wait as long as we have waited.

We wish the introduction of the ghosts through the trap-doors of the stage were altogether omitted. The speeches which they address to Richard might be delivered just as well from behind the scenes. These sort of exhibitions are only proper for a superstitious age; and in an age not superstitious, excite ridicule instead of terror. Mr. Kean’s acting in Richard, as we before remarked, presents a perpetual succession of striking pictures. He bids fair to supply us with the best Shakspeare gallery we have had.

We do not think Mr. Kean* at all improved by his Irish expedition. As this is a point in which we feel a good deal of interest, both on Mr. Kean’s account and our own, we shall state briefly our objections to some alterations in his mode of acting, which appear to us for the worse. His pauses are twice as long as they were, and the rapidity with which he hurries over other parts of the dialogue is twice as great as it was. In both these points his style of acting always bordered on the very verge of

* October 7, 1814.

extravagance ; and we suspect it has at present passed the line. There are, no doubt, passages in which the pauses can hardly be too long, or too marked ; these must be, however, of rare occurrence ; and it is in the finding out these exceptions to the general rule, and in daring to give them all their effect, that the genius of an actor discovers itself. But the most common-place drawling monotony is not more mechanical or more offensive than the converting these exceptions into a general rule, and making every sentence an alternation of dead pauses and rapid transitions.* It is not in extremes that dramatic genius is shewn, any more than skill in music consists in passing continually from the highest to the lowest note. The quickness of familiar utterance with which Mr. Kean pronounced the anticipated doom of Stanley, "Chop off his head," was quite ludicrous. Again, the manner in which, after his nephew said, "I fear no uncles dead," he suddenly turned round,

* An old gentleman, riding over Putney Bridge, turned round to his servant, and said, "Do you like eggs, John?" "Yes, sir." Here the conversation ended. The same gentleman riding over the same bridge that day year, again turned round and said, "How?"—"Poached, sir," was the answer. This is the longest pause upon record, and has something of a dramatic effect, though it could not be transferred to the stage. Perhaps an actor might go so far, on the principle of indefinite pauses, as to begin a sentence in one act, and to finish it in the next.

and answered, "And I hope none living, sir," was, we thought, quite out of character. The motion was performed, and the sounds uttered, in the smallest possible time in which a puppet could be made to mimic or gabble the part. For this we see not the least reason, and can only account for it from a desire to give excessive effect by a display of the utmost dexterity of execution.

It is almost needless to observe, that executive power in acting, as in all other arts, is only valuable as it is made subservient to truth and nature. Even some want of mechanical skill is better than the perpetual affectation of shewing it. The absence of a quality is often less provoking than its abuse, because less voluntary.

The part which was least varied was the scene with Lady Anne. This is, indeed, nearly a perfect piece of acting. In leaning against the pillar at the commencement of the scene, Mr. Kean did not go through exactly the same regular evolution of graceful attitudes, and we regretted the omission. He frequently varied the execution of many of his most striking conceptions, and the attempt in general failed, as it naturally must do. We refer particularly to his manner of resting on the point of his sword before he retires to his tent, to his treatment of the letter sent to Norfolk, and to his dying scene with Richmond.

Mr. Kean's bye-play is certainly one of his greatest excellences ; and it might be said, that if Shakspeare had written marginal directions to the players, in the manner of the German dramatists, he would often have directed them to do what Mr. Kean does. Such additions to the text are, however, to be considered as lucky hits, and it is not to be supposed that an actor is to provide an endless variety of these running accompaniments, which he is not in strictness bound to provide at all. In general, we think it a rule, that an actor ought to vary his part as little as possible, unless he is convinced that his former mode of playing it is erroneous. He should make up his mind as to the best mode of representing the part, and come as near to this standard as he can, in every successive exhibition. It is absurd to object to this mechanical uniformity as studied and artificial. All acting is studied or artificial. An actor is no more called upon to vary his gestures or articulation at every new rehearsal of the character, than an author can be required to furnish various readings to every separate copy of his work. To a new audience it is quite unnecessary ; to those who have seen him before in the same part, it is worse than useless. They may at least be presumed to have come to a second representation, because they approved of the first, and will be sure to be disappointed in almost

every alteration. The attempt is endless, and can only produce perplexity and indecision in the actor himself. He must either return perpetually in the same narrow round, or, if he is determined to be always new, he may at last fancy that he ought to perform the part standing on his head instead of his feet. Besides, Mr. Kean's style of acting is not in the least of the unpremeditated, *improvisatore* kind : it is throughout elaborate and systematic, instead of being loose, off-hand, and accidental. He comes upon the stage as little unprepared as any actor we know. We object particularly to his varying the original action in the dying scene. He at first held out his hands in a way which can only be conceived by those who saw him—in motionless despair,—or as if there were some preternatural power in the mere manifestation of his will :—he now actually fights with his doubled fists, after his sword is taken from him, like some helpless infant.

We have been quite satisfied with the attempts we have seen to ape Mr. Kean in this part, without wishing to see him ape himself in it. There is no such thing as trick in matters of genius. All poetical licenses, however beautiful in themselves, by being parodied, instantly become ridiculous. It is because beauties of this kind have no clue to them, and are reducible to no standard, that it is the peculiar pro-

vince of genius to detect them ; by making them common, and reducing them to a rule, you make them perfectly mechanical, and perfectly absurd into the bargain.

To conclude our hypercritical remarks : we really think that Mr. Kean was, in a great many instances, either too familiar, too emphatical, or too energetic. In the latter scenes, perhaps his energy could not be too great ; but he gave the energy of action alone. He merely gesticulated, or, at best, vociferated the part. His articulation totally failed him. We doubt if a single person in the house, not acquainted with the play, understood a single sentence that he uttered. It was "inexplicable dumb show and noise."—We wish to throw the fault of most of our objections on the managers. Their conduct has been marked by one uniform character, a paltry attention to their own immediate interest, a distrust of Mr. Kean's abilities to perform more than the character he had succeeded in, and a contempt for the wishes of the public. They have spun him tediously out in every character, and have forced him to display the variety of his talents in the same, instead of different characters. They kept him back in Shylock, till he nearly failed in Richard from a cold. Why not bring him out in Macbeth, which was at one time got up for him ? Why not bring him out at once in

a variety of characters, as the Dublin managers have done? It does not appear that either they or he suffered by it. It seems, by all we can find, that versatility is, perhaps, Mr. Kean's greatest excellence. Why, then, not give him his range? Why tantalize the public? Why extort from them their last shilling for the twentieth repetition of the same part, instead of letting them make their election for themselves of what they like best? It is really very pitiful.

Ill as we conceive the London managers have treated him, the London audiences have treated him well, and we wish Mr. Kean, for some years at least, to stick to them. They are his best friends; and he may assuredly account us, who have made these sorry remarks upon him, not among his worst. After he has got through the season here well, we see no reason why he should make himself hoarse with performing Hamlet at twelve o'clock, and Richard at six, at Kidderminster. At his time of life, and with his prospects, the improvement of his fortune is not the principal thing. A training under Captain Barclay would do more towards strengthening his mind and body, his fame and fortune, than sharing bumper receipts with the Dublin managers, or carousing with the whole Irish bar. Or, if Mr. Kean does not approve of this rough regimen, he might devote the summer vacation to the Muses. To a man of genius,

leisure is the first of benefits, as well as of luxuries ; where, "with her best nurse, Contemplation," the mind

"Can plume her feathers, and let grow her wings,
That in the various bustle of resort
Were all too ruffled, and sometimes impaired."

It was our first duty to point out Mr. Kean's excellences to the public, and we did so with no sparing hand ; it is our second duty to him, to ourselves, and the public, to distinguish between his excellences and defects, and to prevent, if possible, his excellences from degenerating into defects.

HAMLET.*

THAT which distinguishes the dramatic productions of Shakspeare from all others, is the wonderful variety and perfect individuality of his characters. Each of these is as much itself, and as absolutely independent of the rest, as if they were living persons, not fictions of the mind. The poet appears for the time being to be identified with the character he wishes to represent, and to pass from one to the other, like the same soul, successively animating different bodies. By an art like that of the ventriloquist, he throws his imagination out of himself,

* March 16, 1817.

and makes every word appear to proceed from the very mouth of the person whose name it bears. His plays alone are properly expressions of the passions, not descriptions of them. His characters are real beings of flesh and blood ; they speak like men, not like authors. One might suppose that he had stood by at the time, and had overheard what passed. Each object and circumstance seems to exist in his mind as it existed in nature ; each several train of thought and feeling goes on of itself, without effort or confusion ; in the world of his imagination every thing has a life, a place and being of its own.

Hamlet is probably of all others the most difficult to personate on the stage. It is like the attempt to embody a shadow.

“ Come then, the colours and the ground prepare,
Dip in the rainbow, trick her off in air ;
Choose a firm cloud, before it falls, and in it
Catch, 'ere she change, the Cynthia of a minute.”

Such nearly is the task which the actor imposes on himself in the part of Hamlet. It is quite remote from hardness and dry precision. The character is spun to the finest thread, yet never loses its continuity. It has the yielding flexibility of “a wave of the sea.” It is made up of undulating lines, without a single sharp angle. There is no set purpose, no straining at a point. The observations

are suggested by the passing scene—the gusts of passion come and go, like the sounds of music borne on the wind. The interest depends not on the action, but on the thoughts—on “that within which passeth shew.” Yet, in spite of these difficulties, Mr. Kean’s representation of the character had the most brilliant success. It did not indeed come home to our feelings, as Hamlet (that very Hamlet whom we read of in our youth, and seem almost to remember in our after-years), but it was a most striking and animated rehearsal of the part.

High as Mr. Kean stood in our opinion before, we have no hesitation in saying, that he stands higher in it (and, we think, will in that of the public), from the powers displayed in this last effort. If it was less perfect as a whole, there were parts in it of a higher cast of excellence than any part of his Richard. We will say at once in what we think his general delineation of the character wrong. It was too strong and pointed. There was often a severity, approaching to virulence, in the common observations and answers. There is nothing of this in Hamlet. He is, as it were, wrapped up in the cloud of his reflections, and only *thinks aloud*. There should therefore be no attempt to impress what he says upon others by any exaggeration of emphasis or manner; no talking *at* his hearers. There should be

as much of the gentleman and scholar as possible infused into the part, and as little of the actor. A pensive air of sadness should sit unwillingly upon his brow, but no appearance of fixed and sullen gloom. He is full of "weakness and melancholy," but there is no harshness in his nature. Hamlet should be the most amiable of misanthropes. There is no one line in this play which should be spoken like any one line in Richard ; yet Mr. Kean did not appear to us to keep the two characters always distinct. He was least happy in the last scene with Guildenstern and Rosencrantz. In some of these more familiar scenes he displayed more energy than was requisite ; and in others, where it would have been appropriate, did not rise equal to the exigency of the occasion. In particular, the scene with Laertes, where he leaps into the grave, and utters the exclamation, "'Tis I, Hamlet the Dane !" had not the tumultuous and overpowering effect we expected from it. To point out the defects of Mr. Kean's performance of the part is a less grateful but a much shorter task than to enumerate the many striking beauties which he gave to it, both by the power of his action and by the true feeling of nature. His surprise when he first sees the Ghost, his eagerness and filial confidence in following it, the impressive pathos of his action and voice in addressing it, "I'll

call thee Hamlet, *Father, Royal Dane,*" were admirable.

Mr. Kean has introduced in this part a *new reading*, as it is called, which we think perfectly correct. In the scene where he breaks from his friends to obey the command of his father, he keeps his sword pointed behind him, to prevent them from following him, instead of holding it before him to protect him from the Ghost. The manner of his taking Guildenstern and Rosencrantz under each arm, under pretence of communicating his secret to them, when he only means to trifle with them, had the finest effect, and was, we conceive, exactly in the spirit of the character. So was the suppressed tone of irony in which he ridicules those who gave ducats for his uncle's picture, though they would "make mouths at him" while his father lived. Whether the way in which Mr. Kean hesitates in repeating the first line of the speech in the interview with the player, and then, after several ineffectual attempts to recollect it, suddenly hurries on with it, "The rugged Pyrrhus," &c., is in perfect keeping, we have some doubts: but there was great ingenuity in the thought; and the spirit and life of the execution was beyond everything. Hamlet's speech in describing his own melancholy, his instructions to the players, and the soliloquy on death, were all delivered by Mr. Kean

in a tone of fine, clear, and natural recitation. His pronunciation of the word "contumely" in the last of these is, we apprehend, not authorized by custom, or by the metre.

Both the closet scene with his mother, and his remonstrances to Ophelia, were highly impressive. If there had been less vehemence of effort in the latter, it would not have lost any of its effect. But whatever nice faults might be found in this scene, they were amply redeemed by the manner of his coming back after he has gone to the extremity of the stage, from a pang of parting tenderness to press his lips to Ophelia's hand. It had an electrical effect on the house. It was the finest commentary that was ever made on Shakspeare. It explained the character at once (as he meant it), as one of disappointed hope, of bitter regret, of affection suspended and not obliterated, by the distractions of the scene around him! The manner in which Mr. Kean acted in the scene of the play before the king and queen was the most daring of any, and the force and animation which he gave to it cannot be too highly applauded. Its extreme boldness "bordered on the verge of all we hate," and the effect it produced was a test of the extraordinary powers of this extraordinary actor.

We cannot speak too highly of Mr. Raymond's

representation of the Ghost. It glided across the stage with the preternatural grandeur of a spirit. His manner of speaking the part was not equally excellent. A spirit should not whine or shed tears.

Mr. Dowton's Polonius was unworthy of so excellent an actor. The part was mistaken altogether. Polonius is not exceedingly wise, but he is not quite a fool; or if he is, he is at the same time a courtier, and a courtier of the old school. Mr. Dowton made nothing, or worse than nothing, of the part.

OTHELLO.*

MR. KEAN's success in Othello was fully equal to the arduousness of the undertaking. In general, we might observe that he displayed the same excellences and the same defects as in his former characters. His voice and person were not altogether in consonance with the character, nor was there throughout the noble tide of deep and sustained passion which raises our admiration and pity of the lofty-minded Moor. There were, however, repeated bursts
~~X~~ of feeling and energy, which we have never seen surpassed. The whole of the latter part of the third act was a master-piece of profound pathos and exquisite conception, and its effect on the house was electrical.

* May 6, 1814.

Mr. Kean's Othello* is his best character, and the highest effort of genius on the stage. We say this without any exception or reserve, yet we wish it was better than it is. In parts, we think he rises as high as human genius can go ; at other times, though powerful, the whole effort is thrown away in a wrong direction, and disturbs our idea of the character. There are some technical objections ; Othello was tall, but that is nothing ; he was black, but that is nothing. But he was not fierce, and that is everything. It is only in the last agony of human suffering that he gives way to his rage and his despair, and it is in working his noble nature up to that extremity, that Shakspeare has shewn his genius and his vast power over the human heart. It was in raising passion to its height, from the lowest beginnings, and in spite of all obstacles, in shewing the conflict of the soul, the tug and war between love and hatred, rage, tenderness, jealousy, remorse, in laying open the strength and the weaknesses of human nature, in uniting sublimity of thought with the anguish of the keenest woe, in putting in motion all the springs and impulses which make up this our mortal being, and at last blending them in that noble tide of deep and sustained passion, impetuous, but majestic, "that flows on to the Propontic and knows

* Jan. 6, 1816.

no ebb,"—that the great excellence of Shakspeare lay. Mr. Kean is in general all passion, all energy, all relentless will. He wants imagination, that faculty which contemplates events, and broods over feelings with a certain calmness and grandeur; his feelings almost always hurry on to action, and hardly ever repose upon themselves. He is too often in the highest key of passion, too uniformly on the verge of extravagance, too constantly on the rack. This does very well in certain characters, as Zanga or Bajazet, where there is merely a physical passion, a boiling of the blood to be expressed, but it is not so in the lofty-minded and generous Moor.]

[We make these remarks the more freely, because there were parts of the character in which Mr. Kean shewed the greatest sublimity and pathos, by laying aside all violence of action. For instance, the tone of voice in which he delivered the beautiful apostrophe, "Then, oh, farewell!" struck on the heart like the swelling notes of some divine music, like the sound of years of departed happiness. Why not all so, or all that is like it? why not speak the affecting passage—"I found not Cassio's kisses on her lips"—why not speak the last speech in the same manner? They are both of them, we do most strenuously contend, speeches of pure pathos, of thought, and feeling, and not of passion, venting itself in violence of

action or gesture. Again, the look, the action, the expression of voice, with which he accompanied the exclamation, "Not a jot, not a jot," was perfectly heart-rending. His vow of revenge against Cassio, and his abandonment of his love for Desdemona, were as fine as possible. The third act had an irresistible effect upon the house, and, indeed, is only to be paralleled by the murder-scene in Macbeth,

Mr. Kean's Othello,* the other night, did not quite answer our over-wrought expectations. He played it *with variations*; and therefore, necessarily worse. There is but one perfect way of playing Othello, and that was the way in which he used to play it. To see him in this character at his best, may be reckoned among the consolations of the human mind. It is to feel our hearts bleed by sympathy with another; it is to vent a world of sighs for another's sorrows; to have the loaded bosom "cleansed of that perilous stuff that weighs upon the soul," by witnessing the struggles and the mortal strokes that "flesh is heir to." We often seek this deliverance from private woes through the actor's obstetric art; and it is hard when he disappoints us, either from indifference or wilfulness. Mr. Kean did not repeat his admired farewell apostrophe to Content, with that fine "organ-stop" that he used,—as if his inmost vows and

* London Magazine, September, 1820.

wishes were ascending to the canopy of Heaven, and their sounding echo were heard upon the earth like distant thunder,—but in a querulous, whining, sobbing tone, which we do not think right. Othello's spirit does not sink under, but supports itself on the retrospect of the past; and we should hear the lofty murmurs of his departing hopes, his ambition and his glory, borne onward majestically “to the passing wind.” He pronounced the “not a jot, not a jot,” as an hysterick exclamation, not with the sudden stillness of fixed despair. As we have seen him do this part before, his lips uttered the words, but they produced and were caused by no corresponding emotion in his breast. They were breath just playing on the surface of his mind, but that did not penetrate to the soul. His manner of saying to Cassio, “But never more be officer of mine,” was in a tone truly terrific, magnificent, prophetic, and the only alteration we remarked as an improvement. We have adverted to this subject here, because we think Mr. Kean cannot wisely undo himself. He is always sufficiently original, sufficiently in extremes; and when he attempts to vary from himself, and go still farther, we think he has no alternative but to run into extravagance. It is true, it may be said of him that he is—

Never so sure our passion to create,
As when he treads the brink of all we hate;

but still one step over the precipice is destruction. We also fear that the critical soil of America is slippery ground. Jonathan is inclined to the safe side of things, even in matters of taste and fancy. They are a little formal and common-place in those parts. They do not like liberties in morals, nor excuse poetical licenses. They do not tolerate the privileges of birth, or readily sanction those of genius. A very little excess above the water-mark of mediocrity is with them quite enough. Mr. Kean will do well not to offend by extraordinary efforts, or dazzling eccentricities. He should be the Washington of actors, the modern Fabius. If he had been educated in the fourth form of St. Paul's school, like some other top-tragedians that we know, we should say to him, in classic terms, *in medio tutissimus ibis*. "Remember that they hiss the Beggar's Opera in America. If they do not spare Captain Macheath, do you think they will spare you? Play off no pranks in the United States. Do not think to redeem great vices by great virtues. They are inexorable to the one, and insensible to the other. Reserve all works of supererogation till you come back, and have safely run the gauntlet of New York, of Philadelphia, of Baltimore, and Boston. Think how Mr. Young would act,—and act with a little more meaning, and a little less pomp than he would—who, we are as-

sured on credible authority, is that model of indifference that the New World would worship and bow down before."—We have made bold to offer this advice, because we wish well to Mr. Kean; and because we wish to think as well as possible of a republican public. We watch both him and them "with the rooted malice of a friend."

IAGO.*

MR. KEAN plays Iago with admirable facility and effect. It is the most faultless of his performances, the most consistent and entire. Perhaps the accomplished hypocrite was never so finely, so adroitly pourtrayed—a gay, light-hearted monster, a careless, cordial, comfortable villain. The preservation of character was so complete, the air and manner were so much of a piece throughout, that the part seemed more like a detached scene or single *trait*, and of shorter duration than it usually does. The ease, familiarity, and tone of nature with which the text was delivered, were quite equal to any thing we have seen in the best comic acting. It was the least overdone of all his parts, though full of point, spirit, and brilliancy. The odiousness of the character was, in fact, in some measure, glossed over by the extreme

* May 9, 1814.

grace, alacrity, and rapidity of the execution. Whether this effect were “a consummation of the art devoutly to be wished,” is another question, on which we entertain some doubts. We have already stated it as our opinion, that Mr. Kean is not a literal transcriber of his author’s text; he translates his characters with great freedom and ingenuity into a language of his own; but at the same time we cannot help preferring his liberal and spirited dramatic versions to the dull, literal, common-place monotony of his competitors. Besides, after all, in the conception of the part, he may be right, and we may be wrong. We have before complained that Mr. Kean’s Richard was not gay enough, and we should now be disposed to complain that his Iago is not grave enough.

We certainly think his performance of this part * one of the most extraordinary exhibitions on the stage. There is no one within our remembrance, who has so completely foiled the critics as this celebrated actor: one sagacious person imagines that he must perform a part in a certain manner; another virtuoso chalks out a different path for him; and when the time comes, he does the whole off in a way that neither of them had the least conception of, and which both of them are therefore very ready to con-

* July 3, 1814.

demn as entirely wrong. It was ever the trick of genius to be thus. We confess that Mr. Kean has thrown us out more than once. For instance, we are very much inclined to persist in the objection we before made, that his Richard is not gay enough, and that his Iago is not grave enough. This he may perhaps conceive to be the mere caprice of captious criticism ; but we will try to give our reasons, and shall leave them to Mr. Kean's better judgment.

It is to be remembered, then, that Richard was a princely villain, borne along in a sort of triumphal car of royal state, buoyed up with the hopes and privileges of his birth, reposing even on the sanctity of religion, trampling on his devoted victims without remorse, and who looked out and laughed from the high watch-tower of his confidence and his expectations, on the desolation and misery he had caused around him. He held on his way, unquestioned, "hedged in with the divinity of kings," amenable to no tribunal, and abusing his power *in contempt of mankind*. But as for Iago, we conceive differently of him. He had not the same natural advantages. He was a mere adventurer in mischief, a pains-taking, plodding knave, without patent or pedigree, who was obliged to work his up-hill way by wit, not by will, and to be the founder of his own fortune. He was, if we may be allowed a vulgar allusion, a true

prototype of modern Jacobinism, who thought that talents ought to decide the place; a man of "morbid sensibility" (in the fashionable phrase), full of distrust, of hatred, of anxious and corroding thoughts, and who, though he might assume a temporary superiority over others by superior adroitness, and pride himself in his skill, could not be supposed to assume it as a matter of course, as if he had been entitled to it from his birth.

We do not here mean to enter into the characters of the two men, but something must be allowed to the difference of their situations. There might be the same indifference in both as to the end in view, but there could not well be the same security as to the success of the means. Iago had to pass through a different ordeal: he had no appliances and means to boot; no royal road to the completion of his tragedy. His pretensions were not backed by authority; they were not baptized at the font; they were not holy-water proof. He had the whole to answer for in his own person, and could not shift the responsibility to the heads of others. Mr. Kean's Richard was therefore, we think, deficient in something of that regal jollity and reeling triumph of success which the part would bear; but this we can easily account for, because it is the traditional common-place idea of the character, that he is to

"play the dog—to bite and snarl."—The extreme unconcern and laboured levity of his Iago, on the contrary, is a refinement and original device of the actor's own mind, and deserves a distinct consideration. The character of Iago, in fact, belongs to a class of characters common to Shakspeare, and at the same time peculiar to him, namely, that of great intellectual activity, accompanied with a total want of moral principle, and therefore displaying itself at the constant expense of others, making use of reason as a pander to will—employing its ingenuity and its resources to palliate its own crimes, and aggravate the faults of others, and seeking to confound the practical distinctions of right and wrong, by referring them to some overstrained standard of speculative refinement.

Some persons, more nice than wise, have thought the whole of the character of Iago unnatural. Shakspeare, who was quite as good a philosopher as he was a poet, thought otherwise. He knew that the love of power, which is another name for the love of mischief, was natural to man. He would know this as well or better than if it had been demonstrated to him by a logical diagram, merely from seeing children paddle in the dirt, or kill flies for sport. We might ask those who think the character of Iago not natural, why they go to see it performed

—but from the interest it excites, the sharper edge which it sets on their curiosity and imagination ? Why do we go to see tragedies in general ? Why do we always read the accounts in the newspapers of dreadful fires and shocking murders, but for the same reason ? Why do so many persons frequent executions and trials ; or why do the lower classes almost universally take delight in barbarous sports and cruelty to animals, but because there is a natural tendency in the mind to strong excitement, a desire to have its faculties roused and stimulated to the utmost ? Whenever this principle is not under the restraint of humanity or the sense of moral obligation, there are no excesses to which it will not of itself give rise, without the assistance of any other motive, either of passion or self-interest. Iago is only an extreme instance of the kind ; that is, of diseased intellectual activity, with an almost perfect indifference to moral good or evil, or rather with a preference of the latter, because it falls more in with his favourite propensity, gives greater zest to his thoughts, and scope to his actions. Be it observed, too (for the sake of those who are for squaring all human actions by the maxims of Rochefoucault), that he is quite or nearly as indifferent to his own fate as to that of others ; that he runs all risks for a trifling and doubtful advantage ; and is himself the dupe

and victim of his ruling passion—an incorrigible love of mischief—an insatiable craving after action of the most difficult and dangerous kind. Now this, though it be sport, yet it is dreadful sport. There is no room for trifling and indifference, nor scarcely for the appearance of it; the very object of his whole plot is to keep his faculties stretched on the rack, in a state of watch and ward, in a sort of breathless suspense, without a moment's interval of repose. He has a desperate stake to play for, like a man who fences with poisoned weapons, and has business enough on his hands to call for the whole stock of his sober circumspection, his dark duplicity and insidious gravity. He resembles a man who sits down to play at chess, for the sake of the difficulty and complication of the game, and who immediately becomes absorbed in it. His amusements, if they are amusements, are severe and saturnine—his very wit blisters. Even if other circumstances permitted it, the part he has to play with Othello requires that he should assume the most serious concern, and something of the plausibility of a confessor. "His cue is villainous melancholy, with a sigh like Tom o'Bedlam." He is repeatedly called "honest Iago," which looks as if there were something suspicious in his appearance, which admitted a different construction. The tone which he adopts in the scenes

with Roderigo, Desdemona, and Cassio, is only a relaxation from the more arduous business of the play. Yet there is in all his conversation an inveterate misanthropy, a licentious keenness of perception, which is always sagacious of evil, and snuffs up the tainted scent of its quarry with rancorous delight. An exuberance of spleen is the essence of the character. The view which we have here taken of the subject (if at all correct) will not, therefore, justify the extreme alteration which Mr. Kean has introduced into the part.

Actors in general have been struck only with the wickedness of the character, and have exhibited an assassin going to the place of execution. Mr. Kean has abstracted the wit of the character, and makes Iago appear throughout an excellent good fellow, and lively bottle-companion. But though we do not wish him to be represented as a monster or a fiend, we see no reason why he should instantly be converted into a pattern of comic gaiety and good humour. The light which illuminates the character should rather resemble the flashes of lightning in the murky sky, which make the darkness more terrible. Mr. Kean's Iago is, we suspect, too much in the sun. His manner of acting the part would have suited better with the character of Edmund in King Lear, who, though in other respects much the same, has a

the next, his imagination runs riot in the mischief he is plotting, and breaks out into the wildness and impetuosity of real enthusiasm :—

“ *Roderigo.* Here is her father’s house, I’ll call aloud.

Iago. Do, with like timorous accent and dire yell,
As when, by night and negligence, the fire
Is spied in populous cities.”

There is nothing here of the trim levity and epigrammatic conciseness of Mr. Kean’s manner of acting the part ; which is no less paradoxical than Mrs. Greville’s celebrated Ode to Indifference. Iago was a man of genius, and not a *petit maitre*. One of his most frequent topics, on which he is rich indeed, and in descanting on which his spleen serves him for a muse, is the disproportionate match between Desdemona and the Moor. This is brought forward in the first scene, and is never lost sight of afterwards.

“ *Brabantio.* What is the reason of this terrible summons ?

Iago. Sir, you’re robb’d ; for shame, put on your gown ;
Your heart is burst, you have lost half your soul :
Arise, arise,
Awake the snorting citizens with the bell,
Or else the devil will make a grandsire of you.
Arise, I say.”—[*And so on to the end of the passage.*]

Now all this goes on springs well oiled : Mr. Kean’s mode of giving the passage had the tightness

of a drum-head, and was muffled (perhaps purposely so) into the bargain.

This is a clue to the character of the lady which Iago is not at all ready to part with. He recurs to it again in the second act, when, in answer to his insinuations against Desdemona, Roderigo says,—

“I cannot believe that in her—she’s full of most bless’d conditions.

Iago. Bless’d fig’s end. The wine she drinks is made of grapes. If she had been bless’d, she would never have loved the Moor.”

And again, with still more effect and spirit afterwards, when he takes advantage of this very suggestion arising in Othello’s own breast :—

“*Othello.* And yet how nature erring from itself—

Iago. Aye, there’s the point ;—as, to be bold with you, Not to affect many proposed matches, Of her own clime, complexion, and degree, Whereunto we see in all things Nature tends ; Foh ! one may smell in such, a will most rank, Foul disproportions, thoughts unnatural.”

This is probing to the quick. “Our Ancient” here turns the character of poor Desdemona, as it were, inside out. It is certain that nothing but the genius of Shakspeare could have preserved the entire interest and delicacy of the part, and have even drawn an additional elegance and dignity from the

peculiar circumstances in which she is placed. The character, indeed, has always had the greatest charm for minds of the finest sensibility.

For our own part, we are a little of Iago's council in this matter; and, all circumstances considered, and platonics out of the question, if we were to cast the complexion of Desdemona physiognomically, we should say that she had a very fair skin, and very light auburn hair, inclining to yellow! We at the same time give her infinite credit for purity and delicacy of sentiment; but it so happens that purity and grossness sometimes

“nearly are allied,
And thin partitions do their bounds divide.”

Yet the reverse does not hold; so uncertain and undefinable a thing is moral character! It is no wonder that Iago had some contempt for it, “who knew all qualities of human dealings, with a learned spirit.” There is considerable gaiety and ease in his dialogue with Emilia and Desdemona on their landing. It is then holiday time with him; but yet the general satire will be acknowledged (at least by one half of our readers) to be biting enough, and his idea of his own character is finely expressed in what he says to Desdemona, when she asks him how he would praise her—

"Oh, gentle lady, do not put me to it,
For I am nothing, if not critical."

Mr. Kean's execution of this part we thought admirable ; but he was quite as much at his ease in every other part of the play, which was done (we know not why) in a single key.

The part in which, according to our conception, Mr. Kean failed most, was in the third act with Othello, where "comes the tug of war." The following passage is, we think, decisive to our purpose :—

Iago. My noble lord.

Othello. What dost thou say, Iago ?

Iago. Did Michael Cassio,

When you woo'd my lady, know of your love ?

Othello. He did from first to last.

Why dost thou ask ?

Iago. But for a satisfaction of my thought ;
No further harm.

Othello. Why of thy thought, Iago ?

Iago. I did not think he had been acquainted with it.

Othello. O yes, and went between us very oft—

Iago. Indeed !

Othello. Indeed ! Ay, indeed. Discern'st thou aught of
that ?

Is he not honest ?

Iago. Honest, my Lord ?

Othello. Honest ? Ay, honest.

Iago. My Lord, for aught I know.

Othello. What dost thou think ?

Iago. Think, my Lord !

Othello. Think, my Lord ! Alas, thou echo'st me,
As if there were some monster in thy thought
Too hideous to be shewn. Thou dost mean something :
I heard thee say even now, thou lik'dst not that—
When Cassio left my wife. What didst not like ?
And when I told thee, he was of my counsel,
Of my whole course of wooing ; thou criedst, indeed !
And didst contract and purse thy brow together,
As if thou then hadst shut up in thy brain
Some horrible conceit : If thou dost love me,
Shew me thy thought.

Iago. My Lord, you know I love you.

Othello. I think thou dost :
And for I know thou'rt full of love and honesty,
And weigh'st thy words before thou giv'st them breath,
Therefore these stops of thine fright me the more :
For such things in a false disloyal knave
Are tricks of custom : but in a man that's just,
They're cold dilations working from the heart,
Which passion cannot rule."

Now, if there is any thing of superficial gaiety or heedlessness in this, " it is not written in the bond :" —the breaks and stops, the pursing and knitting of the brow together, the deep internal working of hypocrisy under the mask of love and honesty, escaped us on the stage.—The same observation applies to what he says afterwards of himself :—

" Though I perchance am vicious in my guess,
As I confess it is my nature's plague
To spy into abuses, and oft my jealousy
Shapes faults that are not."

The candour of this confession would hardly be extorted from him, if it did not correspond with the moody dissatisfaction, and suspicious, creeping, cat-like watchfulness of his general appearance. The anxious suspense, the deep artifice, the collected earnestness, and, if we may so say, the *passion* of hypocrisy, are decidedly marked in every line of the whole scene, and are worked up to a sort of paroxysm afterwards, in that inimitably characteristic apostrophe :—

“O Grace ! O Heaven forgive me !
Are you a man ? Have you a soul or sense ?
God be wi’ you : take mine office. O, wretched fool,
That lov’st to make thine honesty a vice !
Oh, monstrous world ! take note, take note, O world !
To be direct and honest, is not safe.
I thank you for this profit, and from hence
I’ll love no friend, since love breeds such offence.”

This burst of hypocritical indignation might well have called forth all Mr. Kean’s powers, but it did not. We might multiply passages of the same kind, if we had time.

The philosophy of the character is strikingly unfolded in the part where Iago gets the handkerchief :—

“ This may do something.
The Moor already changes with my poisons,
Which at the first are scarce found to distaste,

But with a little act upon the blood,
Burn like the mines of sulphur."

We here find him watching the success of his experiment, with the sanguine anticipation of an alchemist at the moment of projection :—

" I did say so :
Look where he comes.—[Enter *Othello*]—Not poppy nor
mandragora,
Nor all the drowsy syrups of the world,
Shall ever medicine thee to that sweet sleep
Which thou ow'dst yesterday."

Again he says :—

" Work on ;
My medicine works ; thus credulous fools are caught,
And many worthy and chaste dames even thus
All guiltless meet reproach."

So that, after all, he would persuade us that his object is only to give an instructive example of the injustice that prevails in the world.

If he is bad enough when he has business on his hands, he is still worse when his purposes are suspended, and he has only to reflect on the misery he has occasioned. His indifference when *Othello* falls in a trance, is perfectly diabolical, but perfectly in character :—

" *Iago*. How is it, General ? Have you not hurt your head ?

Othello. Dost thou mock me ?

Iago. I mock you not, by heaven," &c.

The callous levity which Mr. Kean seems to consider as belonging to the character in general, is proper here, because Iago has no failings connected with humanity ; but he has other feelings and other passions of his own, which are not to be trifled with.

We do not, however, approve of Mr. Kean's pointing to the dead bodies after the catastrophe. It is not in the character of the part, which consists in the love of mischief, not as an end, but as a means, and when that end is attained, though he may feel no remorse, he would feel no triumph. Besides, it is not the text of Shakspeare. Iago does not point to the bed, but Ludovico bids him look at it :— “Look on the tragic loading of this bed,” &c.

MACBETH.*

MR. KEAN'S Richard comes nearer to the original than his Macbeth. He was deficient in the poetry of this character. He did not look like a man who had encountered the Weird Sisters. There should be nothing tight or compact in Macbeth, no tenseness of fibre, nor pointed decision of manner. He has, indeed, energy and manliness of soul, but “subject to all the skyey influences.” He is sure of nothing ; all is left at issue. He runs a-tilt with fortune, and

* Nov. 12, 1814.

is baffled with preternatural riddles. The agitation of his mind resembles the rolling of the sea in a storm ; or he is like a lion in the toils—fierce, impetuous, and ungovernable. In the fifth act, in particular, which is in itself as busy and turbulent as possible, there was not that giddy whirl of the imagination—the character did not burnish out on all sides with those flashes of genius of which Mr. Kean had given so fine an earnest in the conclusion of his Richard. The scene stood still—the parts might be perfect in themselves, but they were not joined together ; they wanted vitality. The pauses in the speeches were too long—the actor seemed to be studying the part, rather than performing it—striving to make every word more emphatic than the last, and “lost too poorly in himself,” instead of being carried away with the grandeur of his subject. The text was not given accurately. Macbeth is represented in the play arming before the castle, which adds to the interest of the scene.

In the delivery of the beautiful soliloquy, “My way of life is fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf,” Mr. Kean was unsuccessful. That fine thoughtful melancholy did not seem to come over his mind, which characterises Mr. Kemble’s recitation of these lines. The very tone of Mr. Kemble’s voice has something retrospective in it—it is an echo of the

past. Mr. Kean in his dress was occasionally too much docked and curtailed for the gravity of the character. His movements were too agile and mercurial, and he fought more like a modern fencing-master than a Scottish chieftain of the eleventh century. He fell at last finely, with his face downwards, as if to cover the shame of his defeat. We recollect that Mr. Cooke discovered the great actor both in the death-scene in Macbeth and in that of Richard. He fell like the ruin of a state, like a king with his regalia about him.

The two finest things that Mr. Kean has ever done are his recitation of the passage in Othello, "Then, oh, farewell the tranquil mind," and the scene in Macbeth after the murder. The former was the highest and most perfect effort of his art. To enquire whether his manner in the latter scene was that of a king who commits a murder, or of a man who commits a murder to become a king, would be "to consider too curiously." But, as a lesson of common humanity, it was heart-rending. The hesitation, the bewildered look, the coming to himself when he sees his hands bloody; the manner in which his voice clung to his throat, and choaked his utterance; his agony and tears, the force of nature overcome by passion—beggared description. It was a scene which no one who saw it can ever efface from his recollection.

ROMEO.

MR. KEAN appearing at Drury Lane in the character of Romeo,* for the first time, the house was crowded at an early hour, and neither those who went to admire, nor those who went to find fault, could go away disappointed. He discovered no new and unlooked-for excellences in the part, but displayed the same extraordinary energies which he never fails to show on every occasion. There is, indeed, a set of ingenious persons, who having perceived, on Mr. Kean's first appearance, that he was a little man with an inharmonious voice, and no very great dignity or elegance of manner, go regularly to the theatre to confirm themselves in this singular piece of sagacity ; and finding that the object of their contempt and wonder has not, since they last saw him, "added a cubit to his stature,"—that his tones have not become "as musical as is Apollo's lute," and that there is still an habitual want of grace about him—are determined, till such a metamorphosis is effected, not to allow a particle of genius to the actor, or of taste or common sense to those who are not stupidly blind to every thing but his defects. That an actor with very moderate abilities, having the advantages of voice, person, and gracefulness of manner on his

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side, should acquire a very high reputation, is what we can understand, and have seen some instances of ; but that an actor with almost every physical disadvantage against him, should, without very extraordinary powers and capacities indeed, be able to excite the most enthusiastic and general admiration, would, we conceive, be a phenomenon in the history of public imposture, totally without example. In fact, the generality of critics who undertake to give the tone to public opinion, have neither the courage nor discernment to decide on the merits of a truly excellent and original actor, and are equally without the candour to acknowledge their error, after they find themselves in the wrong.

In going to see Mr. Kean in any new character, we do not go in the expectation of seeing either a perfect actor or perfect acting ; because this is what we have not yet seen, either in him or in any one else. But we go to see (what he never disappoints us in) great spirit, ingenuity, and originality given to the text in general, and an energy and depth of passion given to certain scenes and passages, which we should in vain look for from any other actor on the stage. In every character that he has played—in Shylock, in Richard, in Hamlet, in Othello, in Iago, in Luke, and in Macbeth—there has been either a dazzling repetition of master-strokes of art and nature,

or if at any time (from a want of physical adaptation, or sometimes of just conception of the character) the interest has flagged for a considerable interval, the deficiency has always been redeemed by some collected and overpowering display of energy or pathos, which electrified at the moment, and left a lasting impression on the mind afterwards. Such, for instance, were the murder-scene in Macbeth, the third act of his Othello, the interview with Ophelia in Hamlet, and, lastly, the scene with Friar Lawrence, and the death-scene in Romeo.

Of the characters that Mr. Kean has played, Hamlet and Romeo are the most like one another, at least in adventitious circumstances; those to which Mr. Kean's powers are least adapted, and in which he has failed most in general truth of conception and continued interest. There is in both characters the same strong tincture of youthful enthusiasm, of tender melancholy, of romantic thought and sentiment; but we confess we did not see these qualities in Mr. Kean's performance of either. His Romeo had nothing of the lover in it. We never saw any thing less ardent or less voluptuous. In the balcony-scene in particular, he was cold, tame, and unimpressive. It was said of Garrick and Barry in this scene, that the one acted it as if he would jump up to the lady, and the other as if he would make the lady jump down

to him. Mr. Kean produced neither of these effects. He stood like a statue of lead. Even Mr. Conway might feel taller on the occasion, and Mr. Coates wonder at the taste of the public. The only time in this scene where he attempted to give any thing like an effect, was when he smiled on over-hearing Juliet's confession of her passion. But the smile was less like that of a fortunate lover who unexpectedly hears his happiness confirmed, than of a discarded lover, who hears of the disappointment of a rival. The whole of this part not only wanted "the silver sound of lovers' tongues by night" to recommend it, but warmth, tenderness—every thing which it should have possessed. Mr. Kean was like a man waiting to receive a message from his mistress through her confidante, not like one who was pouring out his rapturous vows to the idol of his soul. There was neither glowing animation nor melting softness in his manner; his cheek was not flushed, no sigh breathed involuntary from his overcharged bosom; all was forced and lifeless. His acting sometimes reminded us of the scene with Lady Anne, and we cannot say a worse thing of it, considering the difference of the two characters. Mr. Kean's imagination appears not to have the principles of joy, or hope, or love in it. He seems chiefly sensible to pain, or to the passions that spring from it, and to the terrible

energies of mind or body, which are necessary to grapple with, or to avert it. Even over the world of passion he holds but a divided sway : he either does not feel, or seldom expresses, deep, sustained, internal sentiment,—there is no repose in his mind : no feeling seems to take full possession of it, that is not linked to action, and that does not goad him on to the phrenzy of despair. Or if he ever conveys the sublimer pathos of thought and feeling, it is after the storm of passion, to which he has been worked up, has subsided. The tide of feeling then at times rolls deep, majestic, and awful, like the surging sea after a tempest, now lifted to Heaven, now laying bare the bosom of the deep. Thus, after the violence and anguish of the scene with Iago, in the third act of Othello, his voice, in the farewell apostrophe to Content, took the deep intonation of the pealing organ, and heaved from the heart sounds that came on the ear like the funeral dirge of years of promised happiness. So in the midst of the extravagant and irresistible expression of Romeo's grief at being banished from the object of his love, his voice suddenly stops, and falters, and is choked with sobs of tenderness, when he comes to Juliet's name. Those persons must be made of sterner stuff than ourselves, who are proof against Mr. Kean's acting, both in this scene and in his dying convulsion at the

close of the play. But in the fine soliloquy beginning, "What said my man, when my betossed soul, &c."—and at the tomb afterwards—"Here will I set up my everlasting rest, and shake the yoke of inauspicious stars from this world-wearied flesh,"—in these, where the sentiment is subdued and profound, and the passion is lost in calm, fixed despair, Mr. Kean's acting was comparatively ineffectual. There was nothing in his manner of delivering this last exquisitely beautiful speech, which echoed to the still sad music of humanity, which recalled past hopes, or reposed on the dim shadowings of futurity.

Mr. Kean affects the audience from the force of passion instead of sentiment, or sinks into pathos from the violence of action, but seldom rises into it from the power of thought and feeling. In this respect, he presents almost a direct contrast to Miss O'Neill. Her energy always arises out of her sensibility. Distress takes possession of, and overcomes her faculties; she triumphs in her weakness, and vanquishes by yielding. Mr. Kean is greatest in the conflict of passion, and resistance to his fate; in the opposition of his will, in the keen excitement of his understanding. His Romeo is, in the best scenes, very superior to Miss O'Neill's Juliet; but it is with some difficulty, and after some reflection, that we should say that the finest parts of his acting are superior to

the finest parts of hers ;—to her parting with Jaffier, in Belvidera,—to her terror and her joy in meeting with Biron, in Isabella,—to the death-scene in the same character, and to the scene in the prison with her husband as Mrs. Beverley. Her acting is undoubtedly more correct, equable, and faultless throughout than Mr. Kean's, and it is quite as affecting at the time, in the most impassioned parts. But it does not leave the same impression on the mind afterwards. It adds little to the stock of our ideas, or to our materials for reflection, but passes away with the momentary illusion of the scene. And this difference of effect, perhaps, arises from the difference of the parts they have to sustain on the stage. In the female characters which Miss O'Neill plays, the distress is in a great measure physical and natural : that is, such as is common to every sensible woman in similar circumstances. She abandons herself to every impulse of grief or tenderness, and revels in the excess of an uncontrollable affliction. She can call to her aid, with perfect propriety and effect, all the weaknesses of her sex,—tears, sighs, convulsive sobs, shrieks, death-like stupefaction, and laughter more terrible than all. But it is not the same in the parts in which Mr. Kean has to act. There must here be a manly fortitude, as well as a natural sensibility. There must be a restraint constantly put

upon the feelings by the understanding and the will. He must be "as one, in suffering all, who suffers nothing." He cannot give way entirely to his situation or his feelings, but must endeavour to become master of them, and of himself. This, in our conception, must make it more easy to give entire effect and interest to female characters on the stage, by rendering the expression of passion more obvious, simple, and natural; and must also make them less rememberable afterwards, by leaving less scope for the exercise of intellect, and for the distinct and complicated reaction of the character upon circumstances. At least, we can only account in some such way for the different impressions which the acting of these two admired performers make on our mind when we see or when we think of them. As critics, we particularly feel this. Mr. Kean affords a never-failing source of observation and discussion; we can only *praise* Miss O'Neill.—The peculiarity and the stronghold of Mrs. Siddons' acting was, that she, in a wonderful manner, united both the extremes of acting here spoken of,—that is, all the frailties of passion, with all the strength and resources of the intellect.

RICHARD II.*

WE are not in the number of those who are anxious in recommending the getting-up of Shakspeare's plays in general, as a duty which our stage-managers owe equally to the author, and the reader of those wonderful compositions. The representing the very finest of them on the stage, even by the best actors, is, we apprehend, an abuse of the genius of the poet; and even in those of a second-rate class, the quantity of sentiment and imagery greatly outweighs the immediate impression of the situation and story. Not only are the more refined poetical beauties and minuter strokes of character lost to the audience, but the most striking and impressive passages, those which having once read we can never forget, fail comparatively of their effect, except in one or two rare instances indeed. It is only the *pantomime* part of tragedy, the exhibition of immediate and physical distress, that which gives the greatest opportunity for "inexpressible dumb-show and noise," which is sure to tell, and tell completely on the stage. All the rest, all that appeals to our profounder feelings, to reflection and imagination—all that affects us most deeply in our closets, and, in fact, constitutes the glory of Shakespeare—is little else than an interruption and a drag

* Examiner, March 16, 1815.

on the business of the stage. *Segnius per aures demissa*, &c. Those parts of the play on which the reader dwells the longest, and with the highest relish in the perusal, are hurried through in the performance, while the most trifling and exceptionable are obtruded on his notice, and occupy as much time as the most important. We do not mean to say that there is less knowledge or display of mere stage effect in Shakspeare than in other writers, but that there is much greater knowledge and display of other things, which divide the attention with it, and to which it is not possible to give an equal force in the representation. Hence it is, that the reader of the plays of Shakspeare is almost always disappointed in seeing them acted; and, for our own parts, we should never go to see them acted, if we could help it.

Shakspeare has embodied his characters so very distinctly, that he stands in no need of the actor's assistance to make them more distinct; and the representation of the character on the stage almost uniformly interferes with our conception of the character itself. The only exceptions we can recollect to this observation are Mrs. Siddons and Mr. Kean —the former of whom in one or two characters, and the latter, not certainly in any one character, but in very many passages, have raised our imagination of the part they acted. It may be asked, then, why all great actors choose characters from Shakspeare to

come out in ; and, again, why these become their favourite parts ? First, it is not that they are able to exhibit their author, but that he enables them to shew themselves off. The only way in which Shakspeare appears to greater advantage on the stage than common writers is, that he stimulates the faculties of the actor more. If he is a sensible man, he perceives how much he has to do, the inequalities he has to contend with, and he exerts himself accordingly ; he puts himself at full speed, and lays all his resources under contribution ; he attempts more, and makes a greater number of brilliant failures ; he plays off all the tricks of his art to mimic the poet ; he does all he can, and bad is often the best. We have before said that there are some few exceptions. If the genius of Shakspeare does not shine out undiminished in the actor, we perceive certain effects and refractions of it in him. If the oracle does not speak quite intelligibly, yet we perceive that the priest at the altar is inspired with the god, or possessed with a demon. To speak our minds at once, we believe that in acting Shakspeare there is a greater number of good things marred than in acting any other author. In fact, in going to see the plays of Shakspeare, it would be ridiculous to suppose, that any one ever went to see Hamlet or Othello represented by Kean or Kemble ; we go to see Kean or Kemble in Hamlet or Othello. On the

contrary, Miss O'Neill and Mrs. Beverley are, we take it, one and the same person. As to the second point, viz. that Shakspeare's characters are decidedly favourites on the stage in the same proportion as they are in the closet, we deny it altogether. They either do not tell so much, or very little more than many others. Mrs. Siddons was quite as great in Mrs. Beverley and Isabella as in Lady Macbeth or Queen Katherine: yet no one, we apprehend, will say that the poetry is equal. It appears, therefore, not that the most intellectual characters excite most interest on the stage, but that they are objects of greater curiosity; they are nicer tests of the skill of the actor, and afford greater scope for controversy, how far the sentiment is "overdone or come tardy of." There is more in this circumstance than people in general are aware of. We have no hesitation in saying, for instance, that Miss O'Neill has more popularity *in the house* than Mr. Kean. It is quite as certain that he is more thought of *out of it*. The reason is, that she is not "food for the critics," whereas Mr. Kean notoriously is; there is no end of the topics he affords for discussion—for praise and blame.

All that we have said of acting in general applies to his Richard II. It has been supposed that this is his finest part: that is, however, a total misrepresentation. There are only one or two electrical

shocks given in it ; and in many of his characters he gives a much greater number.—The excellence of his acting is in proportion to the number of hits, for he has not equal truth or purity of style. Richard II. was hardly given correctly as to the general outline. [Mr. Kean made it a character of *passion*, that is, of feeling combined with energy ; whereas it is a character of *pathos*, that is to say, of feeling combined with weakness. This, we conceive, is the general fault of Mr. Kean's acting, that it is always energetic or nothing. He is always on full stretch—never relaxed. He expresses all the violence, the extravagance, and fierceness of the passions, but not their misgivings, their helplessness, and sinkings into despair. He has too much of that strong nerve and fibre that is always equally elastic.] We might instance, to the present purpose, his dashing the glass down with all his might, in the scene with Hereford, instead of letting it fall out of his hands, as from an infant's ; also, his manner of ex-postulating with Bolingbroke, “Why on thy knee, thus low, &c.,” which was altogether fierce and heroic, instead of being sad, thoughtful, and melancholy. If Mr. Kean would look into some passages in this play—into that, in particular, “Oh, that I were a mockery king of snow, to melt away before the sun of Bolingbroke”—he would find a clue to this

character, and to human nature in general, which he seems to have missed—how far feeling is connected with the sense of weakness as well as of strength, or the power of imbecility, and the force of passiveness.

We never saw Mr. Kean look better than when we saw him in Richard II., and his voice appeared to us to be stronger. We saw him near, which is always in his favour; and we think one reason why the editor of this paper was disappointed in first seeing this celebrated actor, was his being at a considerable distance from the stage. We feel persuaded that, on a nearer and more frequent view of him, he will agree that he is a perfectly original, and sometimes a perfectly natural actor; that if his conception is not always just or profound, his execution is masterly; that where he is not the very character he assumes, he makes a most brilliant rehearsal of it; that he never wants energy, ingenuity, and animation, though he is often deficient in dignity, grace, and tenderness; that if he frequently disappoints us in those parts where we expect him to do most, he as frequently surprises us by striking out unexpected beauties of his own; and that the objectionable parts of his acting arise chiefly from the physical impediments he has to overcome.

This alteration of Richard II. is the best that has been attempted: for it consists entirely of omissions,

except one or two scenes, which are idly tacked on to the conclusion.

ZANGA.*

THE play of the Revenge is an obvious transposition of Othello: the two principal characters are the same; only their colours are reversed. The giving the dark, treacherous, fierce, and remorseless character to the Moor is an alteration which is more in conformity to our prejudices, as well as to historical truth. We have seen Mr. Kean in no part to which his general style of acting is so completely adapted as to this, or to which he has given greater spirit and effect. He had all the wild impetuosity of barbarous revenge, the glowing energy of the untamed children of the sun, whose blood drinks up the radiance of fiercer skies. He was like a man stung with rage, and bursting with stifled passions. His hurried motions had the restlessness of the panther's: his wily caution, his cruel eye, his quivering visage, his violent gestures, his hollow pauses, his abrupt transitions, were all in character. The very vices of Mr. Kean's general acting might almost be said to assist him in the part. What, in our judgment, he wants is dignified repose and deep internal sentiment. But in Zanga nothing of this kind is re-

* May 25, 1815.

quired. The whole character is violent ; the whole expression is in action. The only passage which struck us as one of calm and philosophical grandeur, and in which Mr. Kean failed, from an excess of misplaced energy, was the one in the conclusion, where he describes the tortures he is about to undergo, and expresses his contempt for them. Certainly, the predominant feeling here is that of stern, collected, impenetrable fortitude, and the expression given to it should not be that of a pantomimic exaggeration of the physical horrors, to which he professes to rise superior. The mind in such a situation recoils upon itself, summons up its own powers and resources, and should seem to await the blow of fate with the stillness of death. The scene in which he discloses himself to Alonzo, and insults over his misery, was terrific : the attitude in which he tramples on the body of his prostrate victim was not the less dreadful from its being perfectly beautiful. Among the finest instances of natural expression were the manner in which he interrupts himself in his relation to Alonzo, "I knew you could not bear it," and his reflection when he sees that Alonzo is dead—"And so is my revenge." The play should end here : the soliloquy afterwards is a mere drawing piece of common-place morality.

ABEL DRUGGER.*

MR. KEAN'S Abel Drugger was an exquisite piece of ludicrous *naïveté*. The first word he utters, "Sure," drew bursts of laughter and applause. The mixture of simplicity and cunning in the character could not be given with a more whimsical effect. First, there was the wonder of the poor Tobacconist, when he is told by the Conjuror that his name is Abel, and that he was born on a Wednesday; then the conflict between his apprehensions and his cupidity, as he becomes more convinced that Subtle is a person who has dealings with the devil; and lastly, his contrivances to get all the information he can without paying for it. His distress is at the height, when the two-guinea pocket-piece is found upon him: "He had received it from his grandmother, and would fain save it for his grand-children." The battle between him and Face (Oxberry) was irresistible; and he went off after he had got well through it, strutting, and fluttering his cloak about, much in the same manner that a game cock flaps his wings after a victory.

LEON.†

WE went to see Mr. Kean in Leon at Drury Lane,

* May 25, 1815.

† June 28, 1815.

and, on the whole, liked him less in it than we formerly liked Mr. Kemble in the same part. This preference, however, relates chiefly to personal considerations. In the first scenes of the play, Mr. Kemble's face and figure had a nobleness in them, which formed a contrast to the assumed character of the idiot, and thus carried off the disgusting effect of the part. Mr. Kean both acted and looked it too well. At the same time, we must do justice to the admirable comic talents displayed by Mr. Kean on this occasion. We never saw or heard looks or tones more appropriate and ludicrous. The house was in a roar. His alarm on being first introduced to his mistress, his profession of being "very loving," his shame after first saluting the lady, and his chuckling half-triumph on the repetition of the ceremony, were complete acting. Above all, we admired the careless self-complacent idiotcy with which he marched in, carrying his wife's fan, and holding up her hand. It was the triumph of folly. Even Mr. Liston, with all his inimitable graces in that way, could not have bettered it. In the serious part of the character he appeared to us less perfect. There was not repose enough, not enough of dignity. Leon, we apprehend, ought to be the man of spirit, but still more the gentleman. He has to stand in general upon the defensive, upon his own rights,

upon his own ground, and need not bluster, or look fierce. We will mention one instance in particular. Where he tells the Duke to leave the house, which we think he should do with perfect coolness and confidence, he pointed with his finger to the door, "There, there," with the same significant inveteracy of manner as where, in Iago, he points to the dead body of Othello. The other parts of the play were well supported. Knight, in the old woman, was excellent. His reiteration of "What?" in answer to the Copper Captain's questions, had the startling effect produced by letting off a pistol close at one's ears. It evidently proceeded from a person blest with "double deafness" of body and mind. The morality of this excellent comedy is very indifferent; and having been prompted by the observations of some persons of fashion near us, we got into a train of agreeable reflections on the progressive refinement of this our age and country, which it was our intention to have communicated to our readers, but that we dropped them in the lobbies.

ARANZA.*

MR. KEAN's appearance as Duke Aranza, in the Honey Moon, excited considerable expectations in the public. Our own were not fulfilled. We think

* December, 1815.

this the least brilliant of all his characters. It was Duke and no Duke. It had severity without dignity ; and was deficient in ease, grace, and gaiety. He played the feigned character as if it were a reality. Now we believe that a spirit of raillery should be thrown over the part, so as to carry off the gravity of the imposture. There is in Mr. Kean an infinite variety of talent, with a certain monotony of genius. He has not the same ease in doing common things that he has energy on great occasions. We seldom entirely lose sight of his Richard, and, to a certain degree, in all his acting he " still plays the dog." His dancing was encored. George II. encored Garrick in the *Minuet de la Cour*. Mr. Kean's was not like court dancing ; it had more alacrity than ease.

FLORIS.*

THE Merchant of Bruges ; or, The Beggars' Bush, "altered from Beaumont and Fletcher," assuredly is not a classical drama ; but the spirit of poetry constantly peeps out from beneath the rags, and patches, and miserable disguise, in which it is clothed. Where the eye was most offended by the want of costume, songs and music came to its relief. The airs selected by Mr. T. Cooke were admirably adapted to the situations, and we need not remind

* Dec. 16, 1815.

the critical reader, that the lyrical effusions in Beaumont and Fletcher are master-pieces of their kind. They are exactly fitted to be either "said or sung" under the green-wood tree. One or two of these were sung separately, with a good deal of sweetness and characteristic *naiveté*, by Miss L. Kelly, who is one of the supposed beggars, but a princess in disguise. Either we mistook certain significant intimations, or she wished to make this appear before the proper time.

The scenes from which this play derived its interest, and which both for sentiment and situation were admirable, are those in which Mr. Kean vindicates his character as a merchant and his love for Gertrude, against the arrogant assumptions of her uncle, and disarms the latter in the fight. His retort upon the noble baron, who accuses him of being a barterer of pepper and sugar, "that every petty lord lived upon his rents, or the sale of his beeves, his poultry, his milk, and his butter," made a forcible appeal to John Bull; nor did the manner in which Munden, who is bottle-holder on the occasion, vociferated, "Don't forget butter," take away from the effect. The whole of this scene is (if not in the best) in the most peculiar and striking manner of Beaumont and Fletcher. It is the very petulance of youthful ardour and aspiring self-opinion, defying

and taunting the frigid prejudices of age and custom. If Mr. Kean's voice failed him, his expression and his action did full justice to the heroic spirit and magnanimity of conception of the poet, where he says to his mistress, after depriving his antagonist of his sword, "Within these arms thou art safe as in a wall of brass," and again, folding her to his breast, exclaims, "Come, kiss me, love," and afterwards rising in his extravagant importunity, "Come, say before all these, say that thou lov'st me." We do not think any of the German dramatic paradoxes come up to this in spirit, and in acting, as it were, up to the feeling of the moment, irritated by a triumph over long-established and insolent pretension. The scene between Mr. Kean and Gertrude, where he is in a manner distracted between his losses and his love, had great force and feeling. We have seen him do much the same thing before. There is a very fine pulsation in the veins of his forehead on these occasions, an expression of nature which we do not remember in any other actor. One of the last scenes, in which Clause brings in the money-bags to the creditors, and Kean bends forward pointing to them, and Munden after him, repeating the same attitude, but caricaturing it, was a perfect *coup-de-théâtre*. The last scene rather disappointed our

expectations ; but the whole together passed off admirably, and every one went away satisfied.

The story of the Merchant of Bruges is founded on the usurped authority of Woolmar, as Earl of Flanders, to the exclusion of Gerald, the rightful heir, and his infant son, Floris ; the latter of whom, on his father being driven out by the usurper, has been placed with a rich merchant of Bruges ; whilst the father, with his infant daughter, takes refuge among a band of beggars, whose principal resort is in a wood near the town of Bruges. Young Floris is brought up by the merchant as his own son ; and on the death of his protector, whom he considers as his real father, succeeds to his property, and becomes the principal merchant in Bruges. Gerald, in the mean time, is elected King of the Beggars ; and, by the influence which his authority gives him over the fraternity, he is enabled to assist his son with a large sum of money at a time when he is on the verge of bankruptcy, owing to the non-arrival of several vessels richly laden, and which are detained by contrary winds. This circumstance gives the supposed Beggar considerable influence over the actions of his son, who declares himself ready to pay him the duties of a son, without being at all suspicious that it is indeed his real parent whom he is thus obeying ; and Gerald, determining to reveal

to his son the mystery of his birth, appoints an interview with him at midnight, near the Beggars' Bush, in the Forest. In the mean time Woolmar, having learnt that Gerald and Floris, whom he supposes dead, are still living, and that Gerald is concealed amongst the Beggars, goes with a troop of horse at midnight to the Beggars' Bush, for the purpose of surprising him. His plan is, however, circumvented by Hubert, a nobleman at the court of Woolmar, but who is secretly attached to the right heir. Hubert conveys intelligence of the intended attempt of Woolmar to Gerald, and a strong band of the Beggars are armed, and set in readiness to seize him on his entering a particular part of the forest, to which he is enticed by Hubert, under pretence of leading him to the spot where Gerald is concealed. Here they arrive just at the time Floris, by appointment, meets his father Gerald. Woolmar falls into the trap prepared for him, and is, with his principal confidant, Hemskirk, secured. An explanation takes place, and Gerald resigning his pretensions to his son, Floris, the Merchant is restored to the possession of the earldom of Flanders, and Woolmar, the usurping Earl, is banished for life.

KITELY.*

THE Comedy of Every Man in his Humour acts much better than it reads. It has been observed of Ben Jonson, that he painted not so much human nature as temporary manners, not the characters of men, but their *humours*, that is to say, peculiarities of phrase, modes of dress, gesture, &c., which becoming obsolete, and being in themselves altogether arbitrary and fantastical, have become unintelligible and uninteresting. Brainworm is a particularly dry and abstruse character. We neither know his business nor his motives; his plots are as intricate as they are useless, and as the ignorance of those he imposes upon is wonderful. This is the impression in reading it. Yet from the bustle and activity of this character on the stage, the changes of dress, the variety of affected tones and gipsey jargon, and the limping, distorted gestures, it is a very amusing exhibition, as Mr. Munden plays it. Bobadil is the only actually striking character in the play, or which tells equally in the closet and the theatre. The rest, Master Matthew, Master Stephen, Cob and Cob's Wife, were living in the sixteenth century. But from the very oddity of their appearance and beha-

* Jan. 8, 1816.

viour, they have a very droll and even picturesque effect when acted. It seems a revival of the dead. We believe in their existenee when we see them. As an example of the power of the stage in giving reality and interest to what otherwise would be without it, we might mention the scene in which Brainworm praises Master Stephen's leg. The folly here is insipid, from its seeming carried to an excess,—till we see it; and then we laugh the more at it, the more incredible we thought it before.

The pathos in the principal character, Kitely, is "as dry as the remainder biscuit after a voyage." There is, however, a certain good sense, discrimination, or *logic of passion* in the part, which Mr. Kean pointed in such a way as to give considerable force to it. In the scene where he is about to confide the secret of his jealousy to his servant, Thomas, he was exceedingly happy in the working himself up to the execution of his design, and in the repeated failure of his resolution. The reconciliation-scene with his wife had great spirit, where he tells her, to show his confidence, that "she may sing, may go to balls, may dance," and the interruption of this sudden tide of concession with the restriction—"though I had rather you did not do all this"—was a master-stroke. It was perhaps the first time a parenthesis was ever spoken on the stage as it ought to be. Mr. Kean

certainly often repeats this artifice of abrupt transition in the tones in which he expresses different passions, and still it always pleases,—we suppose, because it is natural. This gentleman is not only a good actor in himself, but he is the cause of good acting in others. The whole play was got up very effectually. Considerable praise is due to the industry and talent shewn by Mr. Harley, in Captain Bobadil. He did his best in it, and that was not ill. He delivered the Captain's well-known proposal for the pacification of Europe, by killing twenty of them each his man a day, with good emphasis and discretion. Bobadil is undoubtedly the hero of the piece ; his extravagant affectation carries the sympathy of the audience along with it, and his final defeat and exposure, though exceedingly humorous, is the only affecting circumstance in the play. Mr. Harley's fault in this and other characters is, that he too frequently assumes mechanical expressions of countenance and bye-tones of humour, which have not any thing to do with the individual part. Oxberry's Master Stephen was very happily hit off; nobody plays the traditional fool of the English stage so well ; he seems not only foolish, but fond of folly.

SIR GILES OVERREACH.*

WE do not know any one now-a-days who could write Massinger's comedy of A New Way to Pay Old Debts, though we do not believe that it was better acted at the time it was first brought out than it is at present. We cannot conceive of any one's doing Mr. Kean's part of Sir Giles Overreach so well as himself. We have seen others in the part, superior in the look and costume, in hardened, clownish, rustic insensibility ; but in the soul and spirit, no one equal to him. He is a truly great actor. This is one of his very best parts. He was not at a single fault. The passages which we remarked as particularly striking and original were those where he expresses his surprise at his nephew's answers, " His fortune swells him !— 'tis rank, he's married !" and again, where, after the exposure of his villanies, he calls to his accomplice Marall in a half-wheedling, half-terrific tone, " Come hither, Marall, come hither." Though the speech itself is absurd and out of character, his manner of stopping when he is running at his foes, " I'm feeble, some widow's curse hangs on my sword," was exactly as if his arm had been suddenly withered, and his powers shrivelled up on the instant. The conclusion was quite overwhelming. Mr. Kean

* January 13, 1816.

looked the part well, and his voice does not fail as it used to do.

We have heard two objections to his manner of doing this part, one of which we think right, and the other not. When he is asked, "Is he not moved by the orphan's tears, the widow's curse?" he answers, "Yes—as rocks by waves, or the moon by howling wolves." Mr. Kean, in speaking the latter sentence, dashes his voice about with the greatest violence, and howls out his indignation and rage. Now we conceive this is wrong: for he has to express not violence, but firm, inflexible resistance to it,—not motion, but rest. The very pause after the word *yes*, points out the cool deliberate way in which it should be spoken. The other objection is to his manner of pronouncing the word "Lord,—Right Honourable Lord," which Mr. Kean uniformly does in a drawling tone, with a mixture of fawning servility and sarcastic contempt. This has been thought inconsistent with the part, and with the desire which Sir Giles has to ennable his family by alliance with a "Lord, a Right Honourable Lord." We think Mr. Kean never showed more genius than in pronouncing this single word *Lord*. It is a complete exposure (produced by the violence of the character) of the elementary feelings which make up the common respect excited by mere rank. This is

nothing but a cringing to power and opinion, with a view to turn them to an advantage with the world. Sir Giles is one of those knaves who "do themselves homage." He makes use of Lord Lovell merely as the stalking horse of his ambition. In other respects he has the greatest contempt for him; and the necessity he is under of paying court to him for his own purposes, infuses a double portion of gall and bitterness into the expression of his self-conscious superiority. No ; Mr. Kean was perfectly right in this : he spoke the word "Lord" *con amore*. His praise of the kiss, "It came twanging off—I like it!" was one of his happiest passages. It would perhaps be as well if, in the concluding scene, he would contrive not to frighten the ladies into hysterics. But the whole together is admirable.

Mr. Munden's Marall was an admirable piece of acting, and produced some of the most complete comic contrasts we ever saw. He overdoes his parts sometimes, and sometimes gets into parts for which he is not fit; but he has a fine broad face and manner which tells all the world over. His manner of avoiding the honour of a salute from the Lady Allworth was a most deliberate piece of humour ; and the account of the unexpected good fortune of young Welborn almost converts his eyes into saucers, and chokes him with surprise.

Mr. Oxberry's Justice Greedy was very entertain-

ing, both from the subject and from his manner of doing it. Oxberry is a man of a practical imagination, and the apparitions of fat turkeys, chines of bacon, and pheasants dressed in toast and butter, evidently floated in rapturous confusion before his senses. There is nothing that goes down better than what relates to eating and drinking, on the stage, in books, or in real life.

We saw Mr. Kean's Sir Giles Overreach on Friday night* from the boxes, and are not surprised at the incredulity as to this great actor's powers, entertained by those persons who have only seen him from that elevated sphere. We do not hesitate to say, that those who have only seen him at that distance, have not seen him at all. The expression of his face is quite lost, and only the harsh and grating tones of his voice produce their full effect on the ear. The same recurring sounds, by dint of repetition, fasten on the attention, while the varieties and finer modulations are lost in their passage over the pit. All you discover is an abstraction of his defects, both of person, voice, and manner. He appears to be a little man in a great passion. The accompaniment of expression is absolutely necessary to explain his tones and gestures: and the outline which he gives of the character, in proportion as it is bold and de-

* Feb. 17, 1816.

cided, requires to be filled up and modified by all the details of execution. Without seeing the workings of his face, through which you read the movements of his soul, and anticipate their violent effects on his utterance and action, it is impossible to understand or feel pleasure in the part. All strong expression, deprived of its gradations and connecting motives, unavoidably degenerates into caricature. This was the effect uniformly produced on those about us, who kept exclaiming, "How extravagant, how odd," till the last scene, where the extreme and admirable contrasts both of voice and gesture in which Mr. Kean's genius shews itself, and which are in their nature more obviously intelligible, produced a change of opinion in his favour.

As a proof of what we have above advanced, it was not possible to discover in the last scene, where he is lifted from the ground by the attendants, and rivets his eyes in dreadful despair upon his daughter, whether they were open or closed. The action of advancing to the middle of the stage, and his faltering accent in saying "Marall, come hither, Marall," could not be mistaken. The applause, however, came almost constantly from those who were near the orchestra, and circulated in eddies round the house. It is unpleasant to see a play from the boxes. There is no part of the house which is so thoroughly wrapped up in itself, and

fortified against any impression from what is passing on the stage ; which seems so completely weaned from all superstitious belief in dramatic illusion ; which takes so little interest in all that is interesting. Not a cravat nor a muscle was discomposed, except now and then by some gesticulation of Mr. Kean, which violated the decorum of fashionable indifference, or by some expression of the author, two hundred years old. Mr. Kean's acting is not, we understand, much relished in the upper circles. It is thought too obtrusive and undisguised a display of nature. Neither was Garrick at all relished at first, by the old nobility, till it became the fashion to admire him. The court dresses, the drawing-room strut, and the sing-song declamation, which he banished from the stage, were thought much more dignified and imposing.

SFORZA.*

We do not think the Duke of Milan will become so great a favourite as Sir Giles Overreach, at Drury-Lane Theatre. The first objection to this play is, that it is an arbitrary falsification of history. There is nothing in the life of Sforza, the supposed hero of the piece, to warrant the account of the extravagant actions and tragical end which are here attributed to him, to say nothing of political events. In the

* March 15, 1816.

second place, his resolution to destroy his wife, to whom he is passionately attached, rather than bear the thought of her surviving him, is as much out of the verge of nature and probability as it is unexpected and revolting, from the want of any circumstances of palliation leading to it. It stands out alone, a piece of pure voluntary atrocity, which seems not the dictate of passion, but a start of frenzy. From the first abrupt mention of this design to his treacherous accomplice, Francesco, he loses the favour, and no longer excites the sympathy of the audience. Again, Francesco is a person whose actions we are at a loss to explain, till the last act of the piece, when the attempt to account for them from motives originally amiable and generous, only produces a double sense of incongruity, and instead of satisfying the mind, renders it totally incredulous. He endeavours to debauch the wife of his benefactor, he then attempts her death, slanders her foully, and wantonly causes her to be slain by the hand of her husband, and has him poisoned by a deliberate stratagem; and all this to appease a high sense of injured honour, "which felt a stain like a wound," and from the tender overflowings of fraternal affection; his sister having, it appears, been formerly betrothed to, and afterwards deserted by the duke.

In the original play, the duke is killed by a poison, which is spread by Francesco over the face of the deceased duchess, whose lips her husband fondly kisses, though cold in death, in the distracted state into which he is plunged by remorse for his rash act. But in the acted play, it is so contrived, that the sister of Francesco personates the murdered duchess, and poisons the duke (as it is concerted with her brother), by holding a flower in her hand, which, as he squeezes it, communicates the infection it has received from some juice in which it has been steeped. How he is to press the flower in her hand, in such a manner as not to poison her as well as himself, is left unexplained. The lady, however, does not die, and a reconciliation takes place between her and her former lover. We hate these sickly sentimental endings, without any meaning in them.

The peculiarity of Massinger's vicious characters seems in general to be, that they are totally void of moral sense, and have a gloating pride and disinterested pleasure in their villainies, unchecked by the common feelings of humanity. Francesco, in the present play, holds it out to the last, defies his enemies, and is "proud to die what he was born." At other times, after the poet has carried on one of these hardened, unprincipled characters for a whole play, he is seized with a sudden qualm of conscience,

and his villain is visited with a judicial remorse. This is the case with Sir Giles Overreach, whose hand is restrained in the last extremity of his rage by "some widow's curse that hangs upon it," and whose heart is miraculously melted by "orphan's tears." We will not, however, deny that such may be a true picture of the mixed barbarity and superstition of the age in which Massinger wrote. We have no doubt that his Sir Giles Overreach, which some have thought an incredible exaggeration, was an actual portrait. Traces of such characters are still to be found in some parts of the country, and in classes to which modern refinement and modern education have not penetrated ;—characters that not only make their own selfishness and violence the sole rule of their actions, but triumph in the superiority which their want of feeling and of principle gives them over their opponents or dependents. In the time of Massinger, philosophy had made no progress in the minds of country gentlemen : nor had the theory of moral sentiments, in the community at large, been fashioned and moulded into shape by systems of ethics continually pouring in upon us from the Universities of Glasgow, Edinburgh, and Aberdeen. Persons in the situation, and with the dispositions of Sir Giles, cared not what wrong they did, nor what was thought of it, if they had only the power to

maintain it. There is no calculating the advantages of civilization and letters, in taking off the hard, coarse edge of rusticity, and in softening social life. The vices of refined and cultivated periods are *personal* vices, such as proceed from too unrestrained a pursuit of pleasure in ourselves, not from a desire to inflict pain on others.

Mr. Kean's Sforza is not his most striking character; on the contrary, it is one of his least impressive, and least successful ones. The mad scene was fine, but we have seen him do better. The character is too much at cross-purposes with itself, and before the actor has time to give its full effect to any impulse of passion, it is interrupted and broken off by some caprice or change of object. In Mr. Kean's representation of it our expectations were often excited, but never thoroughly satisfied, and we were teased with a sense of littleness in every part of it. It entirely wants the breadth, force, and grandeur of his Sir Giles.

MORTIMER.*

THE Iron Chest is founded on the story of Caleb Williams, one of the best novels in the language, and the very best of the modern school; but the play itself is by no means the best play that ever was

* November 30, 1816.

written, either in ancient or modern times, though really in modern times we do not know of any much better. Mr. Colman's serious style, which is in some measure an imitation of Shakspeare's, is natural and flowing ; and there is a constant intermixture as in our elder drama, a *mélange* of the tragic and comic ; but there is rather a want of force and depth in the impassioned parts of his tragedies, and what there is of this kind is impeded in its effect by the comic. The two plots (the serious and ludicrous) do not seem going on and gaining ground at the same time, but each part is intersected and crossed by the other, and has to set out again in the next scene, after being thwarted in the former one, like a person who has to begin a story over again in which he has been interrupted. In Shakspeare, the comic parts serve only as a relief to the tragic. Colman's tragic scenes are not high-wrought enough to require any such relief ; and this perhaps may be a sufficient reason why modern writers, who are so sparing of their own nerves, and those of their readers, should not be allowed to depart from the effeminate simplicity of the classic style. In Shakspeare, again, the common varieties are only an accompaniment to the loftier tragic movement ; at least the only exception is in the part of Falstaff in Henry IV., which is not, however, a tragedy of any deep in-

terest :—in Colman you do not know whether the comedy or tragedy is principal; whether he made the comic for the sake of the tragic, or the tragic for the sake of the comic ; and you suspect he would be as likely as any of his contemporaries to parody his own most pathetic passages, just as Munden caricatures the natural touches of garrulous simplicity in old Adam Winterton, to make the galleries and boxes laugh. The great beauty of Caleb Williams is lost in the play. The interest of the novel arises chiefly from two things ; the gradual working up of the curiosity of Caleb Williams with respect to the murder, by the incessant goading on of which he extorts the secret from Falkland, and then from the systematic persecution which he undergoes from his master, which at length urges him to reveal the secret to the world. Both these are very ingeniously left out by Mr. Colman, who jumps at a conclusion, but misses his end.

The history of the Iron Chest is well known to dramatic readers. Mr. Kemble either could not or would not play the part of Sir Edward Mortimer (the Falkland of Mr. Godwin's novel)—he made nothing of it, or, at least, made short work of it, for it was only played one night. He had a cough and a cold, and he hemmed and hawed, and whined and drivelled through the part in a marvellous manner.

Mr. Colman was enraged at the ill success of his piece, and charged it upon Kemble's acting, who, he said, did not do his best. Now, we confess he generally tries to do his best, and if that best is no better, it is not his fault. We think the fault was in the part, which wants circumstantial dignity. Give Mr. Kemble only the *man* to play, why, he is nothing; give him the paraphernalia of greatness, and he is great. He "wears his heart in compliment extern." He is the statue on the pedestal, that cannot come down without danger of shaming its worshippers; a figure that tells well with appropriate scenery and dresses, but not otherwise. Mr. Kemble contributes his own person to a tragedy, but only that. The poet must furnish all the rest, and make the other parts equally dignified and graceful, or Mr. Kemble will not help him out. He will not lend dignity to the mean, spirit to the familiar; he will not impart life and motion, passion and imagination, to all around him, for he has neither life nor motion, passion nor imagination, in himself. He minds only the conduct of his own person, and leaves the piece to shift for itself. Not so Mr. Kean. "Truly he hath a devil;" and if the fit comes over him too often, yet as tragedy is not the representation of *still life*, we think this much better than being never roused at all. We like

" The fiery soul that, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,
And o'er-inform'd the tenement of clay."

Mr. Kean has passion and energy enough to afford to lend it to the circumstances in which he is placed, without leaning upon them for support. He can make a dialogue between a master and a servant in common life tragic, or infuse a sentiment into the Iron Chest. He is not afraid of being let down by his company. Formal dignity and studied grace are ridiculous, except in particular circumstances; passion and nature are every where the same, and these Mr. Kean carries with him into all his characters, and does not want the others. In the last, however, which are partly things of manner and assumption, he improves, as well as in the recitation of set speeches: for example, in the Soliloquy on Honour, in the present play. His description of the assassination of his rival to Wilford was admirable, and the description of his "seeing his giant form roll before him in the dust," was terrific and grand. In the picturesque expression of passion, by outward action, Mr. Kean is unrivalled. The transitions in this play, from calmness to deep despair—from concealed suspicion to open rage—from smooth, decorous indifference to the convulsive agonies of remorse—gave Mr. Kean frequent opportunities for the display of his

peculiar talents. The mixture of common-place familiarity and solemn injunction in his speeches to Wilford, when in the presence of others, was what no other actor could give with the same felicity and force. The last scene of all—his coming to life again after his swooning at the fatal discovery of his guilt, and then falling back after a ghastly struggle, like a man waked from the tomb, into despair and death, in the arms of his mistress—was one of those consummations of the art, which those who have seen and not felt them in this actor, may be assured that they have never seen or felt any thing in the course of their lives, and never will to the end of them.

BARBAROSSA AND PAUL.*

Mr. KEAN had for his benefit, on Monday, Barbarossa, and the musical after-piece of Paul and Virginia. In the tragedy there was nothing for him to do, and it is only when there is nothing for him to do that he does nothing. The scene in which he throws off his disguise as a slave, and declares himself to be Achmet, the heir to the throne, which Barbarossa has usurped by the murder of his father, was the only one of any effect. We are sorry that Mr. Kean repeats this character *till further notice*.

* Drury Lane, May 31, 1817.

In Paul we liked him exceedingly; but we should have liked him better if he had displayed fewer of the graces and intricacies of the art. The tremulous deliberation with which he introduced some of these ornamental flourishes, put us a little in mind of the perplexity of the lover in the Tatler, who was at a loss, in addressing his mistress, whether he should say,—

“—— And when your song you sing,
Your song you sing with so much art;”

or,

“—— And when your song you sing,
You sing your song with so much art.”

As Mr. Bickerstaff, who was applied to by the poet, declined deciding on this nice point, so we shall not decide whether Mr. Kean sung well or ill, but leave it to be settled by the connoisseurs and the ladies. His voice is clear, full, and sweet, to a degree of tenderness.

CORIOLANUS.*

MR. KEAN's acting is not of the patrician order; he is one of the people, and what might be termed a *radical* performer. He can do all that may become a man “of our infirmity,” “to relish all as sharply, passioned as we;” but he cannot play a god, or one who fancies himself a god, and who is sublime, not

* London Magazine, Feb. 1820.

in the strength of his own feelings, but in his contempt for those of others, and in his imaginary superiority to them. That is, he cannot play Coriolanus so well as he plays some other characters, or as we have seen it played often. Wherever there was a struggle of feelings, a momentary ebullition of pity, or remorse, or anguish—wherever nature resumed her wonted rights—Mr. Kean was equal to himself, and superior to every one else; but the prevailing characteristics of the part are inordinate self-opinion, and haughty elevation of soul, that aspire above competition or control, as the tall rock lifts its head above the skies, and is not bent or shattered by the storm, beautiful in its unconquered strength, terrible in its unaltered repose. Mr. Kean, instead of “keeping his state,” instead of remaining fixed and immovable (for the most part) on his pedestal of pride, seemed impatient of this mock dignity, this *still-life* assumption of superiority; burst too often from the trammels of precedent, and the *routine* of etiquette, which should have confined him; and descended into the common arena of man, to make good his pretensions by the energy with which he contended for them, and to prove the hollowness of his supposed indifference to the opinion of others by the excessive significance and studied variations of the scorn and disgust he expressed for it. The intolerable airs and

aristocratical pretensions of which he is the slave, and to which he falls a victim, did not seem *legitimate* in him, but upstart, turbulent, and vulgar. Thus his haughty answer to the mob who banish him—“I BANISH YOU”—was given with all the virulence of execration, and rage of impotent despair, as if he had to strain every nerve and faculty of soul to shake off the contamination of their hated power over him, instead of being delivered with calm, majestic self-possession, as if he remained rooted to the spot, and his least motion, word, or look, must scatter them like chaff or scum from his presence. The most effective scene was that in which he stands for the consulship, and begs for “the most sweet voices” of the people whom he loathes ; and the most ineffective was that in which he is reluctantly reconciled to, and overcome by the entreaties of his mother. This decisive and affecting interview passed off as if nothing had happened, and was conducted with diplomatic gravity and skill. The casting of the other parts was a climax in bathos. Mr. Gattie was Menenius, the friend of Coriolanus, and Mr. Penley Tullus Aufidius, his mortal foe. Mr. Pope should have played the part. One would think there were processions and ovations enough in this play, as it was acted in John Kemble's time ; but besides these, there were introduced others of the same sort, some

of which were lengthened out as if they would reach all the way to the circus ; and there was a sham fight, of melodramatic effect, in the second scene, in which Mr. Kean had like to have lost his voice. There was throughout a continual din of—

“Guns, drums, trumpets, blunderbuss, and thunder”—

or what was very like it. In the middle of an important scene, the tinkling of the stage-bell was employed to announce a flourish of trumpets—a thing which even Mr. Glossop would not hear of, whatever the act of parliament might say to enforce such a puppet-show accompaniment. There is very bad management in all this ; and yet Mr. Elliston is the manager.

HARLEQUIN—IMITATIONS—AND JAFFIER.*

We saw Mr. Kean at his benefit, at the risk of our limbs, and are sorry for the accident that happened to himself in the course of the evening. We have longed ever since we saw Mr. Kean—that is, any time these six years—to see him jump through a trap-door—hearing he could do it. “Why are these things hid ? Is this a time to conceal virtues ?” said we to ourselves. What was our disappointment, then, when on the point of this consummation of our wishes—

* London Magazine, July, 1820.

just in the moment of the projection of our hopes—when dancing with Miss Valancey, too, he broke the tendon Achilles, and down fell all our promised pleasure, our castles in the air! Good reader, it was not the jump through the trap-door that we wished literally to see, but the leap from Othello to Harlequin. What a jump! What an interval, what a gulf to pass! What an elasticity of soul and body too—what a diversity of capacity in the same diminutive person! To be Othello, a man should be all passion, abstraction, imagination: to be Harlequin, he should have his wits in his heels, and in his fingers' ends! To be both, is impossible, or miraculous. Each doubles the wonder of the other; and in judging of the aggregate amount of merit, we must proceed, not by the rules of addition, but multiply Harlequin's lightness into Othello's gravity, and the result will give us the sum total of Mr. Kean's abilities. What a spring, what an expansive force of mind, what an untamed vigour, to rise to such a height from such a lowness; to tower like a phœnix from its ashes; to ascend like a pyramid of fire! Why, what a complex piece of machinery is here; what an involution of faculties, circle within circle, that enables the same individual to make a summersault, and that swells the veins of his forehead with true artificial passion, and that turns him to a marble

statue with thought! It is not being educated in the fourth form of St. Paul's school, or cast in the antique mould of the high Roman fashion, that can do this; but it is genius alone that can raise a man thus above his first origin, and make him thus various from himself! It is bestriding the microcosm of man like a Colossus: and, by uniting the extremes of the chain of being, seemingly implies all the intermediate links. We do not think much of Mr. Kean's singing: we could, with a little practice and tuition, sing nearly as well ourselves: as for his dancing, it is but *so so*, and any body can dance: his fencing is good, nervous, firm, fibrous, like that of a pocket Hercules:—but for his jumping through a hole in the wall,—clean through, head over heels, like a shot out of a culverin—"by heavens, it would have been great!" This we fully expected at his hands, and in this expectation we were baulked. Just as our critical anticipations were on tip-toe, Mr. Kean suddenly strained his ankle, as it were to spite us;—we went out in dudgeon, and were near missing his Imitations, which would not have signified much if we had. They were tolerable, indifferent, pretty good, but not the thing. Mr. Mathews's or Mr. Yates's are better. They were softened down, and fastidious. Kemble was not very like. Incledon and Braham were the best, and Munden was very

middling. The after-piece of the Admirable Crichton, in which he was to do all this, was neither historical nor dramatic. The character, which might have given excellent opportunities for the display of a variety of extraordinary accomplishments in the real progress of the story, was ill-conceived and ill-managed. He was made either a pedagogue or an antic. In himself, he was dull and grave, instead of being high-spirited, volatile, and self-sufficient ; and to show off his abilities, he was put into masquerade. We did not like it at all ; though, from the prologue, we had expected more point and daring. Mr. Kean's Jaffier was fine, and in parts admirable. This, indeed, is only to say that he played it. But it was not one of his finest parts, nor indeed one in which we expected him to shine pre-eminently : but on that we had not depended, for we never know beforehand what he will do best or worst. He is one of those wandering fires, whose orbit is not calculable by any known rules of criticism. Mr. Elliston's Pierre was, we are happy to say, a spirited and effectual performance. We must not forget to add, that Mrs. M'Gibbon's Belvidera was excellent, declaimed with impassioned propriety, and acted with dignity and grace.

LEAR.*

WE need not say how much our expectations had been previously excited to see Mr. Kean in this character, and we are sorry to be obliged to add, that they were very considerably disappointed. We had hoped to witness something of the same effect produced upon an audience that Garrick is reported to have done in the part which made Dr. Johnson resolve never to see him repeat it—the impression was so terrific and overwhelming. If we should make the same rash vow never to see Mr. Kean's Lear again, it would not be from the intensity and excess, but from the deficiency and desultoriness of the interest excited. To give some idea of the manner in which this character might, and ought to be, made to seize upon the feelings of an audience, we have heard it mentioned, that once, when Garrick was in the middle of the mad-scene, his crown of straw came off, which circumstance, though it would have been fatal to a common actor, did not produce the smallest interruption, or even notice in the house. On another occasion, while he was kneeling to repeat the curse, the first row in the pit stood up in order to see him better; the second row, not willing to lose the precious moments by remonstrating, stood up too: and so, by a tacit movement, the entire pit

*1820.

rose to hear the withering imprecation, while the whole passed in such cautious silence, that you might have heard a pin drop. John Kemble (that old campaigner) was also very great in the curse: so we have heard, from very good authorities; and we put implicit faith in them.—What led us to look for the greatest things from Mr. Kean in the present instance, was his own opinion, on which we have a strong reliance. It was always his favourite part. We have understood he has been heard to say, that “he was very much obliged to the London audiences for the good opinion they had hitherto expressed of him, but that when they came to see him over the dead body of Cordelia, they would have quite a different notion of the matter.” As it happens, they have not yet had an opportunity of seeing him over the dead body of Cordelia: for, after all, our versatile Manager has acted Tate’s Lear instead of Shakespeare’s; and it was suggested, that perhaps Mr. Kean played the whole ill *out of spite*, as he could not have it his own way—a hint to which we lent a willing ear, for we would rather think Mr. Kean the most spiteful man, than not the best actor, in the world! The impression, however, made on our minds was, that, instead of its being his master-piece, he was to seek in many parts of the character;—that the general conception was often perverse or feeble;

and that there were only two or three places where he could be said to electrify the house. It is altogether inferior to his Othello. Yet, if he had even played it equal to that, all we could have said of Mr. Kean would have been that he was a very wonderful man ;—and such we certainly think him as it is. Into the bursts, and starts, and torrent of the passion in Othello, this excellent actor appeared to have flung himself completely : there was all the fitful fever of the blood, the jealous madness of the brain : his heart seemed to bleed with anguish, while his tongue dropped broken, imperfect accents of woe ; but there is something (we don't know how) in the gigantic, outspread sorrows of Lear, that seems to elude his grasp, and baffle his attempts at comprehension. The passion in Othello pours along, so to speak, like a river, torments itself in restless eddies, or is hurled from its dizzy height, like a sounding cataract. That in Lear is more like a sea, swelling, chafing, raging, without bound, without hope, without beacon or anchor. Torn from the hold of his affections and fixed purposes, he floats a mighty wreck in the wide world of sorrows. Othello's causes of complaint are more distinct and pointed, and he has a desperate, a maddening remedy for them in his revenge. But Lear's injuries are without provocation, and admit of no alleviation or atone-

ment. They are strange, bewildering, overwhelming: they wrench asunder, and stun the whole frame: they "accumulate horrors on horror's head," and yet leave the mind impotent of resources, cut off, proscribed, anathematised from the common hope of good to itself, or ill to others—amazed at its own situation, but unable to avert it, scarce daring to look at, or to weep over it. The action of the mind, however, under this load of disabling circumstances, is brought out in the play in the most masterly and triumphant manner: it staggers under them, but it does not yield. The character is cemented of human strength and human weaknesses (the firmer for the mixture):—abandoned of fortune, of nature, of reason, and without any energy of purpose, or power of action left,—with the grounds of all hope and comfort failing under it,—but sustained, reared to a majestic height out of the yawning abyss, by the force of the affections, the imagination, and the cords of the human heart—it stands a proud monument, in the gap of nature, over barbarous cruelty and filial ingratitude. We had thought that Mr. Kean would take possession of this time-worn, venerable figure, "that has outlasted a thousand storms, a thousand winters," and, like the gods of old, when their oracles were about to speak, shake it with present inspiration:—that he would set up a living copy

of it on the stage : but he failed, either from insurmountable difficulties, or from his own sense of the magnitude of the undertaking. There are pieces of ancient granite that turn the edge of any modern chisel : so perhaps the genius of no living actor can be expected to cope with Lear. Mr. Kean chipped off a bit of the character here and there : but he did not pierce the solid substance, nor move the entire mass.—Indeed, he did not go the right way about it. He was too violent at first, and too tame afterwards. He sunk from unmixed rage to mere dotage. Thus (to leave this general description, and come to particulars) he made the well-known curse a piece of downright rant. He “tore it to tatters, to very rags,” and made it, from beginning to end, an explosion of ungovernable physical rage, without solemnity or elevation. Here it is ; and let the reader judge for himself whether it should be so served.

“ Hear, Nature, hear ; dear goddess, hear a father !
Suspend thy purpose, if thou didst intend
To make this creature fruitful :
Into her womb convey sterility,
Dry up in her the organs of increase,
And from her derogate body never spring
A babe to honour her ! If she must teem,
Create her child of spleen, that it may live,
And be a thwart disnatur'd torment to her ;

Let it stamp wrinkles in her brow of youth,
With cadent tears fret channels in her cheeks ;
Turn all her mother's pains and benefits
To laughter and contempt ; that she may feel,
How sharper than a serpent's tooth it is
To have a thankless child."

Now this should not certainly be spoken in a fit of drunken choler, without any " compunctions visitings of nature," without any relentings of tenderness, as if it was a mere speech of hate, directed against a person to whom he had the most rooted and unalterable aversion. The very bitterness of the imprecations is prompted by, and turns upon, an allusion to the fondest recollections : it is an excess of indignation, but that indignation, from the depth of its source, conjures up the dearest images of love : it is from these that the brimming cup of anguish overflows ; and the voice, in going over them, should falter, and be choked with other feelings besides anger. The curse in Lear should not be *scolded*, but recited as a Hymn to the Penates ! Lear is not a Timon. From the action and attitude into which Mr. Kean put himself to repeat this passage, we had augured a different result. He threw himself on his knees ; lifted up his arms like withered stumps ; threw his head quite back, and in that position, as if severed from all that held him to society, breathed a heart-struck prayer, like the figure of a man obtruncated !

—It was the only moment worthy of himself, and of the character.

In the former part of the scene, where Lear, in answer to the cool didactic reasoning of Gonerill, asks, “Are you our daughter?” &c., Mr. Kean, we thought, failed from a contrary defect. The suppression of passion should not amount to immobility: that intensity of feeling of which the slightest intimation is supposed to convey everything, should not seem to convey nothing. There is a difference between ordinary familiarity and the *sublime* of familiarity. The mind may be staggered by a blow too great for it to bear, and may not recover itself for a moment or two; but this state of suspense of its faculties, “like a phantasma, or a hideous dream,” should not assume the appearance of indifference, or *still-life*. We do not think Mr. Kean kept this distinction (though it is one in which he is often very happy) sufficiently marked in the foregoing question to his daughter, nor in the speech which follows immediately after, as a confirmation of the same sentiment of incredulity and surprise.

“ Does any here know me? This is not Lear;
Does Lear walk thus? speak thus? where are his eyes?
Either his notion weakens, his discernings
Are lethargied—Ha! waking—’tis not so;
Who is it that can tell me who I am?
Lear’s shadow? I would learn; for by the marks
Of sovereignty, of knowledge, and of reason,

I should be false persuaded I had daughters.
Your name, fair gentlewoman?"—

These fearful interrogatories, which stand ready to start away on the brink of madness, should not certainly be asked like a common question, nor a dry sarcasm. If Mr. Kean did not speak them so, we beg his pardon.—In what comes after this, in the apostrophe to Ingratitude, in the sudden call for his horses, in the defence of the character of his train as "men of choice and rarest parts," and in the recurrence to Cordelia's "most small fault," there are plenty of stops to play upon, all the varieties of agony, of anger and impatience, of asserted dignity and tender regret—Mr. Kean struck but two notes all through, the highest and the lowest.

This scene of Lear with Gonerill, in the first act, is only to be paralleled by the doubly terrific one between him and Regan and Gonerill in the second act. To call it a decided failure would be saying what we do not think: to call it a splendid success would be saying so no less. Mr. Kean did not appear to us to set his back fairly to his task, or to trust implicitly to his author, but to be trying experiments upon the audience, and waiting to see the result. We never saw this daring actor want confidence before, but he seemed to cower and hesitate before the public eye in the present instance, and to be looking out for the effect of what he did, while

he was doing it. In the ironical remonstrance to Regan, for example :

“ Dear daughter, I confess that I am old—
Age is unnecessary,” &c.

he might be said to be waiting for the report of the House to know how low he should bend his knee in mimic reverence, how far he should sink his voice into the tones of feebleness, despondency, and mendicancy. But, if ever, it was upon *this* occasion that he ought to have raised himself above criticism, and sat enthroned (in the towering contemplations of his own mind) with Genius and Nature. They alone (and not the critic’s eye, nor the tumultuous voices of the pit) are the true judges of Lear! If he had trusted only to these, his own counsellors and bosom friends, we see no limit to the effect he might have produced. But he did not give any particular effect to the exclamation—

—————“ Beloved Regan,
Thy sister’s naught ; oh, Regan, she hath tied
Sharp-tooth’d unkindness, like a vulture here ;”

nor to the assurance that he will not return to her again—

“ Never, Regan ;
She hath abated me of half my train,
Look’d black upon me ; struck me with her tongue,
Most serpent-like, upon the very heart.
All the stored vengeance of heaven fall
On her ingrateful top !”

nor the description of his two daughters' looks—

—— “Her eyes are fierce ; but thine
Do comfort, and not burn :”

nor to that last sublime appeal to the heavens on
seeing Gonerill approach—

“Oh, heav'ns !
If you do love old men, if your sweet sway
Hallow obedience, if yourselves are old,
Make it your cause, send down, and take my part.
Art not ashame'd to look upon this beard ?
Oh, Regan, will you take her by the hand ?”

One would think there are tones, and looks, and gestures, answerable to these words, to thrill and harrow up the thoughts, to “appal the guilty, and make mad the free,” or that might “create a soul under the ribs of death!” But we did not see or hear them. It was Mr. Kean’s business to furnish them : it would have been ours to feel them, if he had ! It is not enough that Lear’s crosses and perplexities are expressed by single strokes. There should be an agglomeration of horrors, closing him in like a phalanx. His speech should be thick with the fulness of his agony. His face should, as it were, encrust and stiffen into amazement at his multiplied afflictions. A single image of ruin is nothing —there should be a growing desolation all around him. His wrongs should seem enlarged tenfold

through the solid atmosphere of his despair—his thoughts should be vast and lurid, like the sun when he declines—he should be “a huge dumb heap of woe!” The most that Mr. Kean did was to make some single hits here and there; but these did not tell, because they were separated from the main body and movement of the passion. They might be compared to interlineations of the character, rather than parts of the text. In the sudden reiteration of the epithet—“*fiery* quality of the Duke,” applied to Cornwall by Gloucester, at which his jealousy blazes out to extravagance, we thought Mr. Kean feeble and indecisive; but in breaking away at the conclusion of the scene, “I will do such things: what they are, yet I know not; but they shall be the terrors of the earth.”—he made one of those tremendous bursts of energy and grandeur, which shed a glory round every character he plays.

Mr. Kean’s performance of the remainder of the character, when the king’s intellects begin to fail him, and are, at last, quite disordered, was curious and quaint, rather than impressive or natural. There appeared a degree of perversity in all this—a determination to give the passages in a way in which nobody else would give them, and in which nobody else would expect them to be given. But singularity is not always excellence. Why, for instance, should

our actor lower his voice in the soliloquy in the third act, "Blow winds, and crack your cheeks," &c. in which the tumult of Lear's thoughts, and the extravagance of his expressions, seem almost contending with the violence of the storm? We can conceive no reason but that it was contrary to the practice of most actors hitherto. Mr. Rae's manner of mouthing the passage would have been "more germane to the matter." In asking his companion—

"How dost my boy? Art cold?
I'm cold myself"—

there was a shrinking of the frame, and a chill glance of the eye, like the shivering of an ague-fit: but no other feeling surmounted the physical expression. On meeting with Edgar, as Mad Tom, Lear wildly exclaims, with infinite beauty and pathos, "Didst thou give all to thy daughters, and art thou come to this?" And again, presently after, he repeats, "What, have his daughters brought him to this pass? Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give 'em all?"—questions which imply a strong prepossession, the eager indulgence of a favourite idea which has just struck his heated fancy; but which Mr. Kean pronounced in a feeble, sceptical, querulous under-tone, as if wanting information as to some ordinary occasion of insignificant distress. We do not admire these cross-readings of a work like Lear.

They may be very well when the actor's ingenuity, however paradoxical, is more amusing than the author's sense : but it is not so in this case. From some such miscalculation, or desire of finding out a clue to the character, other than "was set down" for him, Mr. Kean did not display his usual resources and felicitous spirit in these terrific scenes :—he drivelled, and looked vacant, and moved his lips, so as not to be heard, and did nothing, and appeared, at times, as if he would quite forget himself. The pauses were too long ; the indications of remote meaning were too significant to be well understood. The spectator was big with expectation of seeing some extraordinary means employed : but the general result did not correspond to the waste of preparation. In a subsequent part, Mr. Kean did not give to the reply of Lear, "Aye, every inch a king!"—the same vehemence and emphasis that Mr. Booth did ; and in this he was justified ; for, in the text, it is an exclamation of indignant irony, not of conscious superiority ; and he immediately adds with deep disdain, to prove the nothingness of his pretensions—

"When I do stare, see how the subject quakes."

Almost the only passage in which Mr. Kean obtained his usual heart-felt tribute, was in his interview with

Cordelia, after he awakes from sleep, and has been restored to his senses—

“ Pray, do not mock me :
I am a very foolish, fond old man,
Fourscore and upwards : and to deal plainly,
I fear, I am not in my perfect mind.
Methinks, I should know you, and know this man ;
Yet I am doubtful ; for I'm mainly ignorant
What place this is ; and all the skill I have
Remembers not these garments ; nay, I know not
Where I did lodge last night. *Do not laugh at me,*
For, as I am a man, I think this lady
To be my child Cordelia.
Cordelia. And so I am ; I am.”

In uttering the last words, Mr. Kean staggered faintly into Cordelia's arms, and his sobs of tenderness, and his ecstasy of joy commingled, drew streaming tears from the brightest eyes—

Which sacred pity had engender'd there.

Mr. Rae was very effective in the part of Edgar, and was received with very great applause. If this gentleman could rein in a certain “false gallop” in his voice and gait, he would be a most respectable addition, from the spirit and impressiveness of his declamation, to the general strength of any theatre, and we heartily congratulate him on his return to Drury Lane.

MRS. SIDDONS.*

PLAYERS should be immortal, if their own wishes or ours could make them so ; but they are not. They not only die like other people, but like other people they cease to be young, and are no longer themselves, even while living. Their health, strength, beauty, voice, fails them ; nor can they, without these advantages, perform the same feats, or command the same applause that they did when possessed of them. It is the common lot ; players are only *not* exempt from it. Mrs. Siddons retired once from the stage ; why should she return to it again ? She cannot retire from it twice with dignity ; and yet it is to be wished that she should do all things with dignity. Any loss of reputation to her is a loss to the world. Has she not had enough of glory ? The homage she has received is greater than that which is paid to queens. The enthusiasm she excited had something idolatrous about it ; she was regarded less with ad-

* June 15, 1816.

miration than with wonder, as if a being of a superior order had dropped from another sphere to awe the world with the majesty of her appearance. She raised tragedy to the skies, or brought it down from thence. It was something above nature. We can conceive of nothing grander. She embodied to our imagination the fables of mythology, of the heroic and deified mortals of elder time. She was not less than a goddess, or than a prophetess inspired by the gods. Power was seated on her brow, passion emanated from her breast as from a shrine. She was tragedy personified. She was the stateliest ornament of the public mind. She was not only the idol of the people, she not only hushed the tumultuous shouts of the pit in breathless expectation, and quenched the blaze of surrounding beauty in silent tears, but to the retired and lonely student, through long years of solitude, her face has shone as if an eye had appeared from heaven; her name has been as if a voice had opened the chambers of the human heart, or as if a trumpet had awakened the sleeping and the dead. To have seen Mrs. Siddons was an event in every one's life; and does she think we have forgot her? Or would she remind us of herself by showing us what *she was not?* Or is she to continue on the stage to the very last, till all her grace and all her grandeur gone, shall leave behind them

only a melancholy blank? Or is she merely to be played off as "the baby of a girl" for a few nights?—"Rather than so," come, Genius of Gil Blas, thou that didst inspire him in an evil hour to perform his promise to the Archbishop of Grenada, "and champion us to the utterance" of what we think on this occasion.

It is said that the Princess Charlotte has expressed a desire to see Mrs. Siddons in her best parts, and this, it is said, is a thing highly desirable. We do not know that the Princess has expressed any such wish, and we shall suppose that she has not, because we do not think it altogether a reasonable one. If the Princess Charlotte had expressed a wish to see Mr. Garrick, this would have been a thing highly desirable, but it would have been impossible; or if she had desired to see Mrs. Siddons *in her best days*, it would have been equally so; and yet without this, we do not think it desirable that she should see her at all. It is said to be desirable that a Princess should have a taste for the fine arts, and that this is best promoted by seeing the highest models of perfection. But it is of the first importance for Princes to acquire a taste for what is reasonable; and the second thing which it is desirable they should acquire is, a deference to public opinion; and we think neither of these objects likely to be promoted in the

way proposed. If it was reasonable that Mrs. Siddons should retire from the stage three years ago, certainly those reasons have not diminished since; nor do we think Mrs. Siddons would consult what is due to her powers or her fame in commencing a new career. If it is only intended that she should act a few nights in the presence of a particular person, this might be done as well in private. To all other applications she should answer—"Leave me to my repose."

Mrs. Siddons always spoke as slow as she ought; she now speaks slower than she did. "The line too labours, and the words move slow." The machinery of the voice seems too ponderous for the power that wields it. There is too long a pause between each sentence, and between each word in each sentence. There is too much preparation. The stage waits for her. In the sleeping scene, she produced a different impression from what we expected. It was more laboured and less natural. In coming on formerly, her eyes were open, but the sense was shut. She was like a person bewildered, and unconscious of what she did. She moved her lips involuntarily: all her gestures were involuntary and mechanical. At present she acts the part more with a view to effect. She repeats the action when she says, "I tell you he cannot rise from his grave,"

with both hands sawing the air, in the style of parliamentary oratory, the worst of all others. There was none of this weight or energy in the way she did the scene the first time we saw her, twenty years ago. She glided on and off the stage almost like an apparition. In the close of the banquet scene, Mrs. Siddons condescended to an imitation which we were sorry for. She said, "Go, go," in the hurried familiar tone of common life, in the manner of Mr. Kean, and without any of that sustained and graceful spirit of conciliation towards her guests, which used to characterise her mode of doing it. Lastly, if Mrs. Siddons has to leave the stage again, Mr. Horace Twiss will write another farewell address for her; if she continues on it, we shall have to criticise her performances. We know which of these two evils we shall think the greatest.

MRS. SIDDONS's appearance in Lady Macbeth at this theatre* on Thursday drew immense crowds to every part of the house. We succeeded in gaining a seat in one of the back boxes, and saw this wonderful performance at a distance, and consequently at a disadvantage. Though the distance of place is a disadvantage to a performance like Mrs. Siddons's Lady Macbeth, we question whether the distance of

* Covent Garden, June 7, 1817.

time at which we have formerly seen it is any. It is nearly twenty years since we first saw her in this character; and certainly the impression which we have still left on our minds from that first exhibition is stronger than the one we received the other evening. The sublimity of Mrs. Siddons's acting is such, that the first impulse which it gives to the mind can never wear out, and we doubt whether this original and paramount impression is not weakened, rather than strengthened, by subsequent repetition. We do not read the tragedy of the Robbers twice; if we have seen Mrs. Siddons in *Lady Macbeth* only once, it is enough. The impression is stamped there for ever, and any after-experiments and critical inquiries only serve to fritter away and tamper with the sacredness of the early recollection. We see into the details of the character, its minute excellences or defects; but the great masses, the gigantic proportions, are in some degree lost upon us by custom and familiarity. It is the first blow that staggers us; by gaining time we recover our self-possession. Mrs. Siddons's *Lady Macbeth* is little less appalling in its effects than the apparition of a preternatural being; but if we were accustomed to see a preternatural being constantly, our astonishment would by degrees diminish.

We do not know whether it is owing to the cause here stated, or to a falling-off in Mrs. Siddons's

acting, but we certainly thought her performance the other night inferior to what it used to be. She speaks too slow, and her manner has not that decided, sweeping majesty which used to characterise her as the Muse of Tragedy herself. Something of apparent indecision is perhaps attributable to the circumstance of her only acting at present on particular occasions. An actress who appears only once a-year cannot play so well as if she was in the habit of acting once a-week. We, therefore, wish Mrs. Siddons would either return to the stage, or retire from it altogether. By her present uncertain wavering between public and private life, she may diminish her reputation, while she can add nothing to it.

MR. KEMBLE'S PERFORMANCES.

SIR GILES OVERREACH.*

WHY they put Mr. Kemble into the part of Sir Giles Overreach, at Covent Garden Theatre, we cannot conceive; we should suppose he would not put himself there. Malvolio, though cross-gartered, did not set himself in the stocks. No doubt it is the managers' doing, who, by rope-dancing, fire-works, play-bill puffs, and by every kind of quackery, seem determined to fill their pockets for the present, and disgust the public in the end, if the public were an animal capable of being disgusted by quackery. But

“ Doubtless the pleasure is as great
In being cheated as to cheat.”

We do not know why we promised last week to give some account of Mr. Kemble's Sir Giles, except that we dreaded the task then; and certainly our

* May 4, 1816.

reluctance to speak on this subject has not decreased, the more we have thought upon it since. We have hardly ever experienced a more painful feeling than when, after the close of the play, the sanguine plaudits of Mr. Kemble's friends, and the circular discharge of hisses from the back of the pit, that came "full volley home,"—the music struck up, the ropes were fixed, and Madame Sachi ran up from the stage to the two-shilling gallery, and then ran down again, as fast as her legs could carry her, amidst the shouts of pit, boxes, and gallery !

" So fails, so languishes, and dies away
All that this world is proud of. So
Perish the roses and the crowns of kings,
Sceptres and palms of all the mighty."

We have here marred some fine lines of Mr. Wordsworth on the instability of human greatness, but it is no matter : for he does not seem to understand the sentiment himself. Mr. Kemble, then, having been thrust into the part, as we suppose, against his will, ran the gauntlet of public opinion in it with a firmness and resignation worthy of a confessor. He did not once shrink from his duty, nor make one effort to redeem his reputation, by "affecting a virtue when he knew he had it not." He seemed throughout to say to his instigators, " You have thrust me into this part—help me out of it, if you can ; for you see I

cannot help myself." We never saw signs of greater poverty, greater imbecility and decrepitude in Mr. Kemble, or in any other actor: it was Sir Giles in his dotage. It was all "Well, well," and, "If you like it, have it so," an indifference and disdain of what was to happen, a nicety about his means, a coldness as to his ends, much gentility and little nature. Was this Sir Giles Overreach? Nothing could be more quaint and out-of-the-way. Mr. Kemble wanted the part to come to him, for he would not go out of his way to the part. He is, in fact, as shy of committing himself with nature, as a maid is of committing herself with her lover. All the proper forms and ceremonies must be complied with, before "they two can be made one flesh." Mr. Kemble sacrifices too much to decorum. He is chiefly afraid of being contaminated by too close an identity with the characters he represents. This is the greatest vice in an actor, who ought never to bungle his part. He endeavours to raise Nature to the dignity of his own person and demeanour, and declines, with a graceful smile and a waive of the hand, the ordinary services she might do him. We would advise him by all means to shake hands, to hug her close, and be friends, if we did not suspect it was too late—that the lady, owing to this coyness, has eloped, and is now in the situation of Dame Hellenore among the Satyrs.

The outrageousness of the conduct of Sir Giles is only to be excused by the violence of his passions and the turbulence of his character. Mr. Kemble inverted this conception, and attempted to reconcile the character, by softening down the action! He “aggravated the part so, that he would seem like any sucking dove.” For example, nothing could exceed the coolness and *sang-froid* with which he raps Marall on the head with his cane, or spits at Lord Lovell: Lord Foppington himself never did any common-place indecency more insipidly. The only passage that pleased us, or that really called forth the powers of the actor, was his reproach to Mr. Justice Greedy: “There is some fury in that *Gut*.” The indignity of the word called up all the dignity of the actor to meet it, and he guaranteed the word, though “a word of naught,” according to the letter and spirit of the convention between them, with a good grace, in the true old English way. Either we mistake all Mr. Kemble’s excellences, or they all disqualify him for this part. Sir Giles hath a devil; Mr. Kemble has none. Sir Giles is in a passion; Mr. Kemble is not. Sir Giles has no regard to appearances; Mr. Kemble has. It has been said of the Venus de Medicis, “So stands the statue that enchanteth the world;” the same might have been said of Mr. Kemble. He is the very still-life and statuary of the

stage ; a perfect figure of a man ; a petrifaction of sentiment, that heaves no sigh and sheds no tear ; an icicle upon the bust of tragedy. With all his faults, he has powers and faculties which no one else on the stage has ; why then does he not avail himself of them, instead of throwing himself upon the charity of criticism ? Mr. Kemble has given the public great, incalculable pleasure ; and does he know so little of the gratitude of the world as to trust to their generosity ?

CATO.*

MR. KEMBLE has resumed his engagements at Covent Garden Theatre for the season ; it is said in the play-bills, for the last time. There is something in the word *last*, that, “being mortal,” we do not like on these occasions : but there is this of good in it, that it throws us back on past recollections, and when we are about to take leave of an old friend, we feel desirous to settle all accounts with him, and to see that the balance is not against us, on the score of gratitude. Mr. Kemble will, we think, find that the public are just, and his last season, if it is to be so, will not, we hope, be the least brilliant of his career. As his meridian was bright, so let his sunset be golden, and without a cloud. His reception in Cato, on Friday, was most flattering, and he well deserved

* October 26, 1816.

the cheering and cordial welcome which he received. His voice only failed him in strength ; but his tones, his looks, his gestures, were all that could be required in the character. He is the most classical of actors. He is the only one of the moderns who both in figure and action approaches the beauty and grandeur of the antique. In the scene of the soliloquy, just before his death, he was rather inaudible, and indeed the speech itself is not worth hearing ; but his person, manner, and dress, seemed cast in the very mould of Roman elegance and dignity.

KING JOHN.*

WE wish we had never seen Mr. Kean. He has destroyed the Kemble religion ; and it is the religion in which we were brought up. Never again shall we behold Mr. Kemble with the same pleasure that we did, nor see Mr. Kean with the same pleasure that we have seen Mr. Kemble formerly. We used to admire Mr. Kemble's figure and manner, and had no idea that there was any want of art or nature. We feel the force and nature of Mr. Kean's acting, but then we feel the want of Mr. Kemble's person. Thus an old and delightful prejudice is destroyed, and no new enthusiasm, no second idolatry comes to take its place. Thus, by degrees, knowledge robs us of plea-

* Covent Garden, Dec. 7, 1816.

sure, and the cold icy hand of experience freezes up the warm current of the imagination, and crusts it over with unfeeling criticism. The knowledge we acquire of various kinds of excellence, as successive opportunities present themselves, leads us to require a combination of them which we never find realized in any individual, and all the consolation for the disappointment of our fastidious expectations is in a sort of fond and doating retrospect of the past. It is possible, indeed, that the force of prejudice might often kindly step in to suspend the chilling effects of experience, and we might be able to see an old favourite by a voluntary forgetfulness of other things, as we saw him twenty years ago; but his friends take care to prevent this, and by provoking invidious comparisons, and crying up their idol as a model of abstract perfection, force us to be ill-natured in our own defence.

We went to see Mr. Kemble's King John, and he became the part so well, in costume, look, and gesture, that if left to ourselves, we could have gone to sleep over it, and dreamt that it was fine, and "when we waked, have cried to dream again." But we were told that it was really fine; as fine as Garrick, as fine as Mrs. Siddons, as fine as Shakspeare; so we rubbed our eyes and kept a sharp look out, but we saw nothing but a deliberate intention on the part of Mr. Kemble to act the part finely. And so he

did in a certain sense, but not by any means as Shakspeare wrote it, nor as it might be played. He did not harrow up the feelings, he did not electrify the sense : he did not enter into the nature of the part himself, nor, consequently, move others with terror or pity. The introduction to the scene with Hubert was certainly excellent : you saw instantly, and before a syllable was uttered, partly from the change of countenance, and partly from the arrangement of the scene, the purpose which had entered his mind to murder the young prince. But the remainder of this trying scene, though the execution was elaborate—painfully elaborate, and the outline well conceived—wanted the filling up, the true and master touches, the deep, piercing, heartfelt tones of nature. It was done well and skilfully, according to the book of arithmetic : but no more. Mr. Kemble, when he approaches Hubert to sound his disposition, puts on an insidious, insinuating, fawning aspect, and so he ought ; but we think it should not be, though it was, that kind of wheedling smile, as if he was going to persuade him that the business he wished him to undertake was a mere jest ; and his natural repugnance to it an idle prejudice, that might be carried off by a certain pleasant drollery of eye and manner. Mr. Kemble's look, to our apprehension, was exactly as if he had just caught the eye of some

person of his acquaintance in the boxes, and was trying to suppress a rising smile at the metamorphosis he had undergone since dinner. Again, he changes his voice three several times, in repeating the name of Hubert ; and the changes might be fine, but they did not vibrate on our feelings ; so we cannot tell. They appeared to us like a tragic *voluntary*. Through almost the whole scene this celebrated actor did not seem to feel the part itself as it was set down for him, but to be considering how he ought to feel it, or how he should express by rule and method what he did not feel. He was sometimes slow, and sometimes hurried : sometimes familiar, and sometimes solemn : but always with an evident design and determination to be so. The varying tide of passion did not appear to burst from the source of nature in his breast, but to be drawn from a theatrical leaden cistern, and then directed through certain conduit-pipes and artificial channels, to fill the audience with well-regulated and harmless sympathy.

We are afraid, judging from the effects of this representation, that “man delights not us, nor woman neither :” for we did not like Miss O’Neill’s Constance better, nor so well, as Mr. Kemble’s King John. This character, more than any other of Shakspeare’s females, treads perhaps upon the verge of extravagance ; the impatience of grief, combined with the

violence of her temper, borders on insanity: her imagination grows light-headed. But still the boundary between poetry and frenzy is not passed: she is neither a virago nor mad. Miss O'Neill gave more of the vulgar than the poetical side of the character. She generally does so of late.

MR. KEMBLE'S RETIREMENT.*

MR. KEMBLE took his leave of the stage on Monday night, in the character of Coriolanus. On his first coming forward to pronounce his Farewell Address, he was received with a shout like thunder: on his retiring after it, the applause was long before it subsided entirely away. There is something in these partings with old public favourites exceedingly affecting. They teach us the shortness of human life, and the vanity of human pleasures. Our associations of admiration and delight with theatrical performers are among our earliest recollections—among our last regrets. They are links that connect the beginning and the end of life together; *their* bright and giddy career of popularity measures the arch that spans our brief existence. It is near twenty years ago since we first saw Mr. Kemble in the same

* Covent Garden, June 25, 1817.



character—yet how short the interval seems! The impression appears as distinct as if it were of yesterday. In fact, intellectual objects, in proportion as they are lasting, may be said to shorten life. Time has no effect upon them. The petty and the personal, that which appeals to our senses and our interests, is by degrees forgotten, and fades away into the distant obscurity of the past. The grand and the ideal, that which appeals to the imagination, can only perish with it, and remains with us, unimpaired in its lofty abstraction, from youth to age; as, wherever we go, we still see the same heavenly bodies shining over our heads! We forget numberless things that have happened to ourselves, one generation of follies after another; but not the first time of our seeing Mr. Kemble, nor shall we easily forget the last! Coriolanus, the character in which he took his leave of the stage, was one of the first in which we remember to have seen him; and it was one in which we were not sorry to part with him, for we wished to see him appear like himself to the last. Nor was he wanting to himself on this occasion: he played the part as well as he ever did—with as much freshness and vigour. There was no abatement of spirit and energy—none of grace and dignity: his look, his action, his expression of the character, were the same as they ever were: they could not be finer. It is mere

cant, to say that Mr. Kemble has quite fallen off of late—that he is not what he was : he may have fallen off in the opinion of some jealous admirers, because he is no longer in exclusive possession of the stage : but in himself he has not fallen off a jot. Why then do we approve of his retiring ? Because we do not wish him to wait till it is *necessary* for him to retire. On the last evening, he displayed the same excellences, and gave the same prominence to the very same passages, that he used to do. We might refer to his manner of doing obeisance to his mother in the triumphal procession in the second act, and to the scene with Aufidius in the last act, as among the most striking instances. The action with which he accompanied the proud taunt to Aufidius—

“Like an eagle in a dove-cote, I
Flutter'd your Volscians in Corioli;
Alone I did it—”

gave double force and beauty to the image. Again, where he waits for the coming of Aufidius in his rival's house, he stood at the foot of the statue of Mars, himself another Mars ! In the reconciliation scene with his mother, which is the finest in the play, he was not equally impressive. Perhaps this was not the fault of Mr. Kemble, but of the stage itself, which can hardly do justice to such thoughts and sentiments as here occur :

" ——— My mother bows ;
As if Olympus to a mole-hill should
In supplication nod."

Mr. Kemble's voice seemed to faint and stagger, to be strained and cracked, under the weight of this majestic image : but, indeed, we know of no tones deep or full enough to bear along the swelling tide of sentiment it conveys ; nor can we conceive any thing in outward form to answer to it, except when Mrs. Siddons played the part of Volumnia.

We may on this occasion be expected to say a few words on the general merits of Mr. Kemble as an actor, and on the principal characters he performed ; in doing which, we shall

" ——— Nothing extenuate,
Nor set down aught in malice."

It has always appeared to us, that the range of characters in which Mr. Kemble more particularly shone, and was superior to every other actor, were those which consisted in the development of some one solitary sentiment or exclusive passion. From a want of rapidity, of scope, and variety, he was often deficient in expressing the bustle and complication of different interests ; nor did he possess the faculty of overpowering the mind by sudden and irresistible bursts of passion : but in giving the habitual workings of a predominant feeling, as in Penruddock, or

The Stranger, in Coriolanus, Cato, and some others, where all the passions move round a central point, and are governed by one master-key, he stood unrivalled. Penruddock, in The Wheel of Fortune, was one of his most correct and interesting performances, and one of the most perfect on the modern stage. The deeply-rooted, mild, pensive melancholy of the character, its embittered recollections, and dignified benevolence, were conveyed by Mr. Kemble with equal truth, elegance, and feeling. In The Stranger, again, which is, in fact, the same character, he brooded over the recollection of disappointed hope till it became a part of himself : it sunk deeper into his mind the longer he dwelt upon it ; his regrets only became more profound as they became more durable. His person was moulded to the character. The weight of sentiment which oppressed him was never suspended : the spring at his heart was never lightened—it seemed as if his whole life had been a suppressed sigh ! So in Coriolanus, he exhibited the ruling passion with the same unshaken firmness, he preserved the same haughty dignity of demeanour, the same energy of will, and unbending sternness of temper throughout. He was swayed by a single impulse. His tenaciousness of purpose was only irritated by opposition ; he turned neither to the right nor the left ; the vehe-

mence with which he moved forward increasing every instant, till it hurried him on to the catastrophe. In Leontes, also, in The Winter's Tale (a character he at one time played often), the growing jealousy of the King, and the exclusive possession which this passion gradually obtains over his mind, were marked by him in the finest manner, particularly where he exclaims—

“—— Is whispering nothing?
Is leaning cheek to cheek? Is meeting noses?
Kissing with inside lip? Stopping the career
Of laughter with a sigh (a note infallible
Of breaking honesty)? Horsing foot on foot?
Skulking in corners? Wishing clocks more swift?
Hours minutes? The moon midnight? and all eyes
Blind with the pin and web, but theirs; theirs only,
That would unseen be wicked? Is this nothing?
Why then the world and that's in't is nothing,
The covering sky is nothing, Bohemia's nothing,
My wife is nothing, if this be nothing!”

In the course of this enumeration, every proof told stronger, and followed with quicker and harder strokes; his conviction became more rivetted at every step of his progress; and at the end, his mind and “every corporal agent” appeared wound up to a frenzy of despair. In such characters, Mr. Kemble had no occasion to call to his aid either the resources of invention or the tricks of the art: his success depended on the increasing intensity with which he

dwelt on a given feeling, or enforced a passion that resisted all interference or control.

In Hamlet, on the contrary, Mr. Kemble, in our judgment, unavoidably failed from a want of flexibility, of that quick sensibility which yields to every motive, and is borne away with every breath of fancy which is distracted in the multiplicity of its reflections, and lost in the uncertainty of its resolutions. There is a perpetual undulation of feeling in the character of Hamlet; but in Mr. Kemble's acting, "there was neither variableness nor shadow of turning." He played it like a man in armour, with a determined inveteracy of purpose, in one undeviating straight line, which is as remote from the natural grace and indolent susceptibility of the character, as the sharp angles and abrupt starts to produce an effect which Mr. Kean throws into it.

In King John, which was one of Mr. Kemble's most admired parts, the transitions of feeling, though just and powerful, were prepared too long beforehand, and were too long in executing to produce their full effect. The actor seemed waiting for some complicated machinery to enable him to make his next movement, instead of trusting to the true impulses of passion. There was no sudden collision of opposite elements; the golden flash of genius was not there; "the fire i' th' flint was cold," for it was not struck. If an image could

be constructed by magic art to play King John, it would play it in much the same manner that Mr. Kemble played it.

In Macbeth, Mr. Kemble was unequal to "the tug and war" of the passions which assail him; he stood as it were at bay with fortune, and maintained his ground too steadily against "fate and metaphysical aid;" instead of staggering and reeling under the appalling visions of the preternatural world, and having his frame wrenched from all the holds and resting places of his will, by the stronger power of imagination. In the latter scenes, however, he displayed great energy and spirit; and there was a fine melancholy retrospective tone in his manner of delivering the lines—

" My way of life has fallen into the sear, the yellow leaf,"— which smote upon the heart, and remained there ever after. His Richard III. wanted that tempest and whirlwind of the soul, that life and spirit, and dazzling rapidity of motion, which fills the stage, and burns in every part of it, when Mr. Kean performs this character. To Mr. Kean's acting in general, we might apply the lines of the poet, where he describes—

" The fiery soul that, working out its way,
Fretted the pigmy body to decay,
And o'er-inform'd the tenement of clay."

Mr. Kemble's manner, on the contrary, had always something dry, hard, and pedantic in it. " You shall relish him more in the scholar than the soldier:" but his monotony did not fatigue, his formality did not displease; because there was always sense and meaning in what he did. The fineness of Mr. Kemble's figure may be supposed to have led to that statue-like appearance, which his acting was sometimes too apt to assume: as the diminutiveness of Mr. Kean's person has probably compelled him to bustle about too much, and to attempt to make up for the want of dignity of form, by the violence and contrast of his attitudes. If Mr. Kemble were to remain in the same posture for half an hour, his figure would only excite admiration: if Mr. Kean were to stand still only for a moment, the contrary effect would be apparent. One of the happiest and most spirited of all Mr. Kemble's performances, and in which even his defects were blended with his excellences to produce a perfect whole, was his *Pierre*. The dissolute indifference assumed by this character, to cover the darkness of his designs, and the fierceness of his revenge, accorded admirably with Mr. Kemble's natural manner; and the tone of morbid, rancorous raillery in which *Pierre* delights to indulge, was in unison with the actor's reluctant, contemptuous personifications of gaiety, with the

scornful spirit of his Comic Muse, which always laboured—*invitâ Minervâ*—against the grain. Cato was another of those parts for which Mr. Kemble was peculiarly fitted by his physical advantages. There was nothing for him to do in this character, but to appear in it. It had all the dignity of still-life. It was a studied piece of classical costume—a conscious exhibition of elegantly disposed drapery, that was all: yet, as a mere display of personal and artificial grace, it was inimitable.

It has been suggested that Mr. Kemble chiefly excelled in his Roman characters, and, among others, in Brutus. If it be meant that he excelled in those which imply a certain stoicism of feeling and energy of will, this we have already granted; but Brutus is not a character of this kind, and Mr. Kemble failed in it for that reason. Brutus is not a stoic, but a humane enthusiast. There is a tenderness of nature under the garb of assumed severity; an inward current of generous feelings, which burst out, in spite of circumstances, with bleeding freshness; a secret struggle of mind, and disagreement between his situation and his intentions; a lofty inflexibility of purpose, mingled with an effeminate abstractedness of thought, which Mr. Kemble did not give.

In short, we think the distinguishing excellence of his acting may be summed up in one word—inten-

sity; in the seizing upon some one feeling or idea, in insisting upon it, in never letting it go, and in working it up, with a certain graceful consistency, and conscious grandeur of conception, to a very high degree of pathos or sublimity. If he had not the unexpected bursts of nature and genius, he had all the regularity of art; if he did not display the tumult and conflict of opposite passions in the soul, he gave the deepest and most permanent interest to the uninterrupted progress of individual feeling; and in embodying a high idea of certain characters, which belong rather to sentiment than passion, to energy of will than to loftiness or to originality of imagination, he was the most excellent actor of his time. This praise of him is not exaggerated: the blame we have mixed with it is not invidious. We have only to add to both, the expression of our grateful remembrances and best wishes—Hail, and farewell!

MISS O'NEILL'S PERFORMANCES.

JULIET.*

We occasionally see something on the stage that reminds us a little of Shakspeare. Miss O'Neill's Juliet, if it does not correspond exactly with our idea of the character, does not degrade it. We never saw Garrick ; and Mrs. Siddons was the only person who ever embodied our idea of high tragedy. Her mind and person were both fitted for it. The effect of her acting was greater than could be conceived before-hand. It perfectly filled and overpowered the mind. The first time of seeing this great actress was an epoch in every one's life, and left impressions which could never be forgotten. She appeared to belong to a superior order of beings, to be surrounded with a personal awe, like some prophetess of old, or Roman matron, the mother of Coriolanus or the Gracchi. Her voice answered to her form,

* August 15, 1814.

and her expression to both. Yet she was a pantomime actress. Her common recitation was faulty. It was in bursts of indignation or grief, in sudden exclamations, in apostrophes and inarticulate sounds, that she raised the soul of passion to its height, or sunk it in despair.

We remember her manner in the Gamester, when Stukeley (it was then played by Palmer) declares his love to her. The look, first of incredulity and astonishment, then of anger, then passing suddenly into contempt, and ending in bitter scorn, and a convulsive burst of laughter, all given in a moment; and laying open every movement of the soul, produced an effect which we shall never forget. Her manner of rubbing her hands, in the night scene of Macbeth, and of dismissing the guests at the banquet, were among her finest things. We have, many years ago, wept outright during the whole time of her playing Isabella, and this we take to have been a higher employment of the critical faculties than doubling down the book in dog-ears to make out a regular list of critical common-places. To the tears formerly shed on such occasions, we may apply the words of a modern dashing orator, "Sweet is the dew of their memory, and pleasant the balm of their recollection."

We have, we believe, been betrayed into this digression, because Miss O'Neill, more than any late

actress, reminded us in certain passages, and in a faint degree, of Mrs. Siddons. This young lady, who will probably become a favourite with the public, is rather tall ; and though not of *the first order of fine forms*, her figure is of that respectable kind, which will not interfere with the characters she represents. Her deportment is not particularly graceful : there is a heaviness and want of firmness about it. Her features are regular, and the upper part of her face finely expressive of terror or sorrow. It has that mixture of beauty and passion which we admire so much in some of the antique statues. The lower part of her face is not equally good. From a want of fullness or flexibility about the mouth, her laugh is not at any time pleasing, and where it is a laugh of terror, is distorted and painful. Her voice, without being musical, is distinct, powerful, and capable of every necessary exertion. Her action is impressive and simple. She looks the part she has to perform, and fills up the pauses in the words by the varied expression of her countenance or gestures, without any thing artificial, pointed, or far-fetched.

In the silent expression of feeling, we have seldom witnessed any thing finer than her acting, where she is told of Romeo's death, her listening to the Friar story of the poison, and her change of manner towards her nurse, when she advises her to marry Paris.

Her delivery of the speeches in the scenes where she laments Romeo's banishment, and anticipates her waking in the tomb, marked the fine play and undulation of natural sensibility, rising and falling with the gusts of passion, and at last worked up into an agony of despair, in which imagination approaches the brink of frenzy. Her actually screaming at the imaginary sight of Tybalt's ghost, appeared to us the only instance of extravagance or caricature. Not only is there a distinction to be kept up between physical and intellectual horror (for the latter becomes more general, internal, and absorbed, in proportion as it becomes more intense), but the scream, in the present instance, startled the audience, as it preceded the speech which explained its meaning. Perhaps the emphasis given to the exclamation, "And Romeo banished!" and to the description of Tybalt, "festering in his shroud," was too much in that epigrammatic, pointed style, which we think inconsistent with the severe and simple dignity of tragedy.

In the last scene, at the tomb with Romeo, which, however, is not from Shakspeare, though it tells admirably on the stage, she did not produce the effect we expected. Miss O'Neill seemed least successful in the former part of the character, in the garden scene, &c. The [expression of tenderness bordered on hoydening and affectation. The character of

Juliet is a pure effusion of nature. It is as serious, and as much in earnest, as it is frank and susceptible. It has all the exquisite voluptuousness of youthful innocence.—There is not the slightest appearance of coquetry in it, no sentimental languor, no meretricious assumption of fondness to take her lover by surprise. She ought not to laugh, when she says, “I have forgot why I did call thee back,” as if conscious of the artifice, nor hang in a fondling posture over the balcony. Shakspeare has given a fine idea of the composure of the character, where he first describes her at the window, leaning her cheek upon her arm. The whole expression of her love should be like the breath of flowers.

‘ ELWINA.*

DURING the last week Miss O'Neill has condescended to play the character of Elwina, in Miss Hannah More's tragedy of Percy; and we shall not readily forgive Miss Hannah More's heroine Elwina, for having made us perceive what we had not felt before, that there is a considerable degree of manner and monotony in Miss O'Neill's acting. The peculiar excellence which has been ascribed to Miss O'Neill (indeed over every other actress) is that of *faultless nature*. Mrs. Siddons's acting is said to have greater

* Nov. 18, 1815.

grandeur, to have possessed loftier flights of passion and imagination ; but then it is objected, that it was not a pure imitation of nature. Miss O'Neill's recitation is indeed nearer the common standard of level speaking, as her person is nearer the common size, but we will venture to say that there is as much a tone, a certain stage sing-song in her delivery as in Mrs. Siddons's. Through all the tedious speeches of this play, she preserved the same balanced artificial cadence, the same melancholy tone, as if her words were the continued echo of a long-drawn sigh. There is the same pitch-key, the same alternation of sad sounds in almost every line. We do not insist upon perfection in any one, nor do we mean to decide how far this intonation may be proper in tragedy ; but we contend that Miss O'Neill does not in general speak in a natural tone of voice, nor as people speak in conversation. Her great excellence is extreme natural sensibility ; that is, she perfectly conceives and expresses what would be generally felt by the female mind in the extraordinary and overpowering situations in which she is placed. In truth, in beauty, and in that irresistible pathos which goes directly to the heart, she has at present no equal, and can have no superior. There were only one or two opportunities for the display of her delightful powers in the character of Elwina, but of these she made

the fullest use. The expression of mute grief, when she hears of the death of Percy, in the last act, was as fine as possible: nor could any thing be more natural, more beautiful or affecting, than the manner in which she receives the scarf, and hurries out with it, tremulously clasping it to her bosom. It was one of those moments of still and breathless passion, in which the tongue is silent, while the heart breaks. We do not approve of her dying scene at all. It was a mere convulsive struggle for breath, the representation of a person in the act of suffocation—one of those agonies of human nature, which, as they do not appeal to the imagination, should certainly not be obtruded on the senses. Once or twice Miss O'Neill dropped her voice so low, and articulated so internally, that we gathered what she said rather from the motion of her lips, than from distinguishing the sound. This in Mr. Kean would be called extravagance. We were heartily glad when the play was over. From the very construction of the plot, it is impossible that any good can come of it till all the parties are dead; and when this catastrophe took place, the audience seemed perfectly satisfied.

MISS O'NEILL'S RETIREMENT.*

THE stage has lost one of its principal ornaments and fairest supports, in the person of Miss O'Neill. As Miss Somerville changed her name for that of Mrs. Bunn, and still remains on the stage, so Miss O'Neill has altered hers for Mrs. Beecher, and has, we fear, quitted us for good and all. "There were two upon the house-top : one was taken, and the other was left!" Though, on our own account, we do not think this "a consummation devoutly to be wished," yet we cannot say we are sorry on hers. Hymen has, in this instance, with his flaming torch and saffron robe, borne a favourite actress from us, and held her fast, beyond the seas and sounding shores, "to our moist vows denied :" but, whatever complaints or repinings have been heard on the occasion, we think Miss O'Neill was in the right to do as she has done. *Fast bind fast find* is an old proverb, and a good one, and is no doubt applicable to both sexes, and on both sides of the water. A husband, like death, cancels all other claims, and we think more especially any imaginary and imperfect obligations (with a clipt sixpence, and clap hands and a bargain) to the stage or to the town. Miss O'Neill (for so her name may yet linger on our tongues) made good

* London Magazine, Feb. 1820.

her retreat in time from the world's "slippery turns," and we are glad that she has done so. It is better to retire from the stage when young, with fame and fortune, than to have to return to it when old (as Mrs. Crawford, Mrs. Abington, and so many others have done), in poverty, neglect, and scorn. There is no marriage for better and for worse to the public; it is but a "Mr. Limberham, or Kind Keeper," at the very best: it does not tie itself to worship its favourites, or "with its worldly goods them endow, through good report or evil report, in sickness or in health, till death them do part." No such thing is even thought of: they must be always young, always beautiful and dazzling, and allowed to be so; or they are instantly discarded, and they pass from their full-blown pride, and the purple light that irradiates them, into "the list of weeds and worn-out faces." If a servant of the theatre dismisses himself without due warning, it makes a great deal of idle talk; but, on the other hand, does the theatre never dismiss one of its servants without formal notice, and is any thing then said about it? How many old favourites of the town—that many-headed abstraction, with new opinions, whims, and follies, ever sprouting from its teeming brain—how many decayed veterans of the stage do we remember, in the last ten or twenty years, laid aside "in monumental mockery,"

thrown from the pinnacle of prosperity and popularity, to pine in poverty and obscurity, their names forgotten, or staring in large capitals, asking for a benefit at some minor theatre ! How many of these are to be seen, walking about with shrunk shanks and tattered hose, avoiding the eye of the stranger whom they suppose to have known them in better days, straggling through the streets with faltering steps, and on some hopeless errand,—with sinking hearts, or heart-broken long ago :—engaged, dismissed again, tampered with, tantalised, trifled with, pelted, hooted, scorned, unpitied : performing quarantine at a distance from the centre of all their hopes and wishes, as if their names were a stain on their former reputations ;—or perhaps received once more,—tolerated, endured out of charity, in the very places that they once adorned and gladdened by their presence ! And all this, often without any fault in themselves, any misconduct, any change, but in the taste and humour of the audience ; or from their own imprudence, in not guarding (while they had an opportunity) against the ingratitude and treachery of that very public that claims them as its property, and would make them its slaves and puppets for life —or during pleasure ? We might make out a long list of superannuated pensioners on public patronage, who have had the last grudging pittance of favour

withdrawn from them, but that it could do no sort of good, and that we would not expose the names themselves to the gaze and wonder of vulgar curiosity. We are only not sorry that Miss O'Neill has put it out of the power of the nobility, gentry, and her friends in general, to add her name to the splendid, tarnished list; and that she cannot, like so many of her predecessors, be chopped and changed, and hacked, and banded about, in tragedy or in comedy, in farce or in pantomime, in dance or song, at the Surrey, or the Coburg, or the Sans Pareil theatres; or even be sent to mingle her silvery cadences with Mr. Kean's hoarse notes at Old Drury.

Miss O'Neill was in size of the middle form: her complexion was fair, and her person not inelegant. She stooped somewhat in the shoulders, but not so as to destroy grace or dignity: in moving across the stage, she dragged a little in her step, with some want of firmness and elasticity. The action of her hands and arms, however (one of the least common, and therefore, we suppose, one of the most difficult accomplishments an actor or actress has to acquire), was perfectly just, simple, and expressive. They either remained in unconscious repose by her side, or, if employed, it was to anticipate or confirm the language of the eye and tongue. There was no affectation, no unmeaning display, or awkward deficiency

in her gesticulation ; but her body and mind seemed to be under the guidance of the same impulse, to move in concert, and to be moulded into unity of effect by a certain natural grace, earnestness, and good sense. The contour of her face was nearly oval, and her features approached to the regularity of the Grecian outline. The expression of them was confined either to the extremity of pain and agony, or to habitual softness and placidity, with an occasional smile of great sweetness. Her voice was deep, clear, and mellow, capable of the most forcible exertion, but, in ordinary speaking, "gentle and low, an excellent thing in woman !" She, however, owed comparatively little to physical qualifications ; there was nothing in her face, voice, or person, sufficiently striking to have obtruded her into notice, or to have been a factitious substitute for other requisites. Her external advantages were merely the medium through which her internal powers displayed their fulgence, without obstruction or refraction (with the exception hereafter to be stated) : they were the passive instruments, which her powerful and delicate sensibility wielded with the utmost propriety, ease, and effect. Her excellence (unrivalled by any actress since Mrs. Siddons) consisted in truth of nature and force of passion. Her correctness did not seem the effect of art or study, but of instinctive sympathy, of a con-

formity of mind and disposition to the character she was playing, as if she had unconsciously become the very person. There were no catching lights, no pointed hits, no theatrical tricks, no female arts resorted to, in her best or general style of acting : there was a singleness, an entireness, and harmony in it, that gave it a double charm as well as a double power. It rested on the centre of its own feelings. Her style of acting was smooth, round, polished, and classical, like a marble statue ; self-supported and self-involved ; owing its resemblance to life, to the truth of imitation ; not to startling movements and restless contortion, but returning continually within the softened line of beauty and nature. Her manner was, in this respect, the opposite of Mr. Kean's, of whom no man can say (either in a good or in a bad sense) that he is like a marble statue, but of whom it may be said, with some appearance of truth, that he is like a paste-board figure, the little, uncouth, disproportioned parts of which children pull awry, twitch, and jerk about in fifty odd and unaccountable directions, to laugh at,—or, like the mock figure of harlequin, that is stuck against the wall, and pulled in pieces, and fastened together again, with twenty idle, pantomimic, eccentric absurdities ! Or he seems to have St. Anthony's fire in his veins, St. Vitus's dance in his limbs, and a devil tugging at every

part :—one shrugging his shoulders, another wagging his head, another hobbling in his legs, another tapping his breast ; one straining his voice till it is ready to crack, another suddenly, and surprisingly, dropping it down into an inaudible whisper, which is made distinct and clear by the *bravos* in the pit, and the shouts of the gallery. There was not any of this paltry patch-work, these vulgar snatches at applause, these stops, and starts, and breaks, in Miss O'Neill's performance, which was sober, sedate, and free from pretence and mummery. We regret her loss the more, and fear we shall have to regret it more deeply every day. In a word, Mr. Kean's acting is like an anarchy of the passions, in which each upstart humour, or frenzy of the moment, is struggling to get violent possession of some bit or corner of his fiery soul and pigmy body—to jostle out, and lord it over the rest of the rabble of short-lived and furious purposes Miss O'Neill seemed perfect mistress of her own thoughts, and if she was not indeed the rightful queen of tragedy, she had at least all the decorum, grace, and self-possession of one of the Maids of Honour waiting around its throne. Miss O'Neill might have played to the greatest advantage in one of the tragedies of Sophocles, which are the perfection of the stately, elegant, and simple drama of the Greeks : we cannot conceive of Mr. Kean making a

part of any such classical group. Perhaps, however, we may magnify his defects in this particular, as we have been accused of over-rating his general merits. We do not think it an easy matter "to praise him or blame him too much." We have never heard any thing to alter the opinion we always entertained of him ; he can only do it himself—by his own acting. While we owe it to him to speak largely of his genius and his powers, we owe it to the public to protest against the eccentricities of the one, or the abuses of the other.

To return from this digression. With all the purity and simplicity, Miss O'Neill possessed the utmost force of tragedy. Her soul was like the sea—calm, beautiful, smiling, smooth, and yielding ; but the storm of adversity lashed it into foam, laid bare its centre, or heaved its billows against the skies. She could repose on gentleness, or dissolve in tenderness, and at the same time give herself up to all the agonies of woe. She could express fond affection, pity, rage, despair, madness. She felt all these passions in their simple and undefinable elements only. She felt them as a woman—as a mistress, as a wife, a mother, or a friend. She seemed to have the most exquisite sense of the pressure of those soft ties that were woven round her heart, and that bound her to her place in society ; and the rending them asunder ap-

peared to give a proportionable revulsion to her frame, and disorder to her thoughts. There was nothing in her acting of a preternatural or *ideal* cast—that could lift the mind above mortality, or might be fancied to descend from another sphere. But she gave the full, the true, and unalloyed expression to all that is common, obvious, and heartfelt in the charities of private life, and in the conflict of female virtue and attachment with the hardest trials and intolerable griefs. She did not work herself up to the extremity of passion, by questioning with her own thoughts; or raise herself above circumstances, by ascending the platform of imagination; or arm herself against fate, by strengthening her will to meet it: no, she yielded to calamity, she gave herself up entire, and with entire devotion, to her unconquerable despair:—it was the tide of anguish swelling in her own breast that overflowed to the breasts of the audience, and filled their eyes with tears, as the loud torrent projects itself from the cliff to the abyss below, and bears every thing before it in its resistless course. The source of her command over public sympathy lay, in short, in the intense conception and unrestrained expression of what she and every other woman of natural sensibility would feel in given circumstances, in which she and every other woman was liable to be placed. Her

Belvidera, Isabella, Mrs. Beverley, &c., were all characters of this strictly feminine class of heroines, and she played them to the life. They were made of softness and suffering. We recollect the first time we saw her in Belvidera, when the manner in which she threw herself into the arms of Jaffier, before they part, was as if her heart would have leaped out of her bosom, if she had not done so. It staggered the spectator like a blow. Again, her first meeting with Biron, in Isabella, was no less admirable and impressive. She looked at, she saw, she knew him ; her surprise, her joy, were painted in her face, and woke every nerve to rapture. She seemed to have perfected all that her heart could do. But the sudden alteration of her look and manner, the shuddering and recoil within herself, when she recovers from her surprise, and recollects her situation, married to another,—at once on the verge of ecstacy and perdition—baffled description, and threw all that she had before done into the shade,—“like to another morn, risen on mid noon.” We could mention many other instances, but they are still too fresh in the memory of our readers to make it necessary. It must be confessed, as perhaps the only drawback on Miss O'Neill's merit, or on the pleasure derived from seeing her, that she sometimes carried the expression of grief, or agony of mind, to a degree

of physical horror that could hardly be borne. Her shrieks, in the concluding scenes of some of her parts, were like those of mandrakes, and you stopped your ears against them: her looks were of "moody madness, laughing wild, amidst severest woe," and you turned your eyes from them, for they seemed to sear like the lightning. Her eye-balls rolled in her head; her words rattled in her throat. This was carrying reality too far. The sufferings of the body are no longer proper for dramatic exhibition when they become objects of painful attention in themselves, and are not merely indicative of what passes in the mind—comments and interpreters of the moral scene within. The effect was the more ungrateful, from the very contrast (as we before hinted) between this lady's form and delicate complexion, and the violent conflict into which she was thrown. She seemed like the little flower, not the knotted oak, contending with the pitiless storm. There appeared no reason why she should "mar that whiter skin of hers than snow, or monumental alabaster," or rend and dishevel, with ruthless hand, those graceful locks, fairer than the opening day. But these were faults arising from pushing truth and nature to an excess; and we should, at present, be glad to see "the best virtues" of others make even an approach to them. Her common style of speaking had a cer-

tain mild and equable intonation, not quite free from *manner*, but in the more impassioned parts she became proportionably natural, bold, and varied. In comedy Miss O'Neill did not, in our judgment, excel; her *forte* was the serious. Had we never seen her play any thing but *Lady Teazle*, we should not have felt the regret at parting with her which we now do, in common with every lover of genius and of the genuine drama.

MR. MACREADY'S DEBUT IN ORESTES.

MR. MACREADY appeared at Covent Garden Theatre on Monday,* in the character of Orestes, in the Distressed Mother, a bad play for the display of his powers, in which, however, he succeeded in making a decidedly favourable impression upon the audience. His voice is powerful in the highest degree, and at the same time possesses great harmony and modulation. His face is not equally calculated for the stage. He declaims better than anybody we have lately heard. He is accused of being violent, and of wanting pathos. Neither of these objections is true. His manner of delivering the first speeches in this play was admirable, and the want of increasing interest afterwards was the fault of the author rather than the actor. The fine suppressed tone in which he assented to Pyrrhus's command to convey the message to Hermione was a test of his variety of power, and brought down repeated acclamations from the house. We do not lay much stress on his mad scene, though that was very good in its kind,

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for mad scenes do not occur very often, and when they do, had in general better be omitted. We have not the slightest hesitation in saying that Mr. Macready is by far the best tragic actor that has come out in our remembrance, with the exception of Mr. Kean. We, however, heartily wish him well out of this character of Orestes. It is a kind of forlorn hope in tragedy. There is nothing to be made of it on the English stage beyond experiment. It is a trial, not a triumph. These French plays puzzle an English audience exceedingly. They cannot attend to the actor, for the difficulty they have in understanding the author. We think it wrong in any actor of great merit (which we hold Mr. Macready to be) to come out in an ambiguous character to salve his reputation. An actor is like a man who throws himself from the top of a steeple by a rope. He should choose the highest steeple he can find, that if he does not succeed in coming safe to the ground, he may break his neck at once, and so put himself and the spectators out of further pain.

Ambrose Phillips's *Distressed Mother* is a very good translation from Racine's *Andromache*. It is an alternation of topics, of *pros* and *cons*, on the casuistry of domestic and state affairs, and produced a great effect of *ennui* on the audience. When you hear one of the speeches in these rhetorical trage-

dies, you know as well what will be the answer to it as when you see the tide coming up the river—you know that it will return again. The other actors filled their parts with successful mediocrity.

We highly disapprove of the dresses worn on this occasion, and supposed to be the exact Greek costume. We do not know that the Greek heroes were dressed like women, or wore their long hair straight down their backs. Or even supposing that they did, this is not generally known or understood by the audience; and though the preservation of the ancient costume is a good thing, it is of more importance not to shock our present prejudices. The managers of Covent Garden are not the Society of Antiquaries. The attention to costume is only necessary to preserve probability: in the present instance it could only violate it, because there is nothing to lead the public opinion to expect such an exhibition. We know how the Turks are dressed, from seeing them in the streets; we know the costume of the Greek statues, from seeing casts in the shop-windows; we know that savages go naked, from reading voyages and travels; but we do not know that the Grecian chiefs at the Siege of Troy were dressed as Mr. Charles Kemble, Mr. Abbott, and Mr. Macready were the other evening in the Distressed Mother. It is a discovery of the mana-

gers; and they should have kept their secret to themselves. The epithet in Homer, applied to the Grecian warriors, Καρη κομωντες, is not any proof. It signifies not *long-haired*, but literally *bushy-headed*, which would come nearer to the common Brutus head than this long dangling slip of hair. The oldest and most authentic models we have are the Elgin Marbles, and it is certain the Theseus is a *crop*. One would think this standard might satisfy the Committee of Managers in point of classical antiquity. But no such thing. They are much deeper in Greek costume and the history of the fabulous ages than those old-fashioned fellows, the sculptors who lived in the time of Pericles. But we have said quite enough on this point.

BENTEVOLE.*

MR. MACREADY's Bentevole is very fine in its kind. It was natural, easy, and forcible. Indeed, we suspect some parts of it were too natural, that is, that Mr. Macready thought too much of what his feelings might dictate in such circumstances, rather than of what the circumstances must have dictated to him to do. We allude particularly to the half significant, half hysterical laugh and distorted jocular leer, with his eyes towards the persons accusing him of the

* October 1, 1816.

murder, when the evidence of his guilt comes out. Either the author did not intend him to behave in this manner, or he must have made the other parties on the stage interrupt him as a self-convicted criminal. His appeal to Manoah (the witness against him) to suppress the proofs which must be fatal to his honour and his life was truly affecting. His resumption of a spirit of defiance was not sufficiently dignified, and was more like the self-sufficient swaggering airs of comedy than the real grandeur of tragedy, which should always proceed from passion. Mr. Macready sometimes, to express uneasiness and agitation, composes his cravat, as he would in a drawing-room. This is, we think, neither graceful nor natural in extraordinary situations. His tones are equally powerful and flexible, varying with the greatest facility from the lowest to the highest pitch of the human voice.

OTHELLO.*

WE have been rather spoiled for seeing any one else in this character, by Mr. Kean's performance of it, and also by having read the play itself lately. Mr. Macready was more than respectable in the part; and he only failed because he attempted to excel. He did not, however, express the individual bursts of

* October 12, 1816.

feeling, nor the deep and accumulating tide of passion which ought to be given in Othello. It may perhaps seem an extravagant illustration, but the idea which we think any actor ought to have of this character, to play it to the height of the poetical conception, is that of a majestic serpent wounded, writhing under its pain, stung to madness, and attempting by sudden darts, or coiling up its whole force, to wreak its vengeance on those about it, and falling at last a mighty victim under the redoubled strokes of its assailants. No one can admire more than we do the force of genius and passion which Mr. Kean shows in this part, but he is not stately enough in it. He plays it like a gipsy, and not like a Moor. We miss in Mr. Kean not the physiognomy, or the costume, so much as the *architectural* building up of the part. This character always puts us in mind of the line—

“Let Afric on its hundred thrones rejoice !”

it not only appears to hold commerce with meridian suns, and that its blood is made drunk with the heat of scorching skies ; but it indistinctly presents to us all the symbols of eastern magnificence. It wears a crown and turban, and stands before us like a tower. All this, it may be answered, is only saying that Mr. Kean is not so tall as a tower : but any one, to play Othello properly, ought to look taller and grander

than any tower. Mr. Macready is tall enough for the part, and the looseness of his figure was rather in character with the flexibility of the south: but there were no sweeping outlines, no massy movements in his action.

The movements of passion in Othello (and the motions of the body should answer to those of the mind) resemble the heaving of the sea in a storm; there are no sharp, slight, angular transitions, or if there are any, they are subject to this general swell and commotion. Mr. Kean is sometimes too wedgy and determined; but Mr. Macready goes off like a shot, and startles our sense of hearing. One of these sudden explosions was when he is in such haste to answer the demands of the senate on his services: "I do agnise a natural hardness," &c., as if he was impatient to exculpate himself from some charge, or wanted to take them at their word lest they should retract. There is nothing of this in Othello. He is calm and collected; and the reason why he is carried along with such vehemence by his passions when they are roused is, that he is moved by their collected force. Another fault in Mr. Macready's conception was, that he whined and whimpered once or twice, and tried to affect the audience by affecting a pitiful sensibility, not consistent with the dignity and masculine imagination of the character: as where he re

peated, "No, not much moved," and again, "Othello's occupation's gone," in a childish treble. The only part which should approach to this effeminate tenderness of complaint is his reflection, "Yet, oh the pity of it, Iago, the pity of it!" What we liked best was his ejaculation, "Swell, bosom, with thy fraught, *for 'tis of aspick's tongues.*" This was forcibly given, and as if his expression were choaked with the bitterness of passion. We do not know how he would have spoken the speech, "Like to the Pontic sea that knows no ebb," &c., which occurs just before, for it was left out. There was also something fine in his uneasiness and inward starting at the name of Cassio, but it was too often repeated, with a view to effect. Mr. Macready got most applause in such speeches as that addressed to Iago, "Horror on horror's head accumulate!" This should be a lesson to him. He very injudiciously, we think, threw himself on a chair at the back of the stage, to deliver the farewell apostrophe to Content, and to the "pride, pomp, and circumstance of glorious war." This might be a relief to him, but it distressed the audience.

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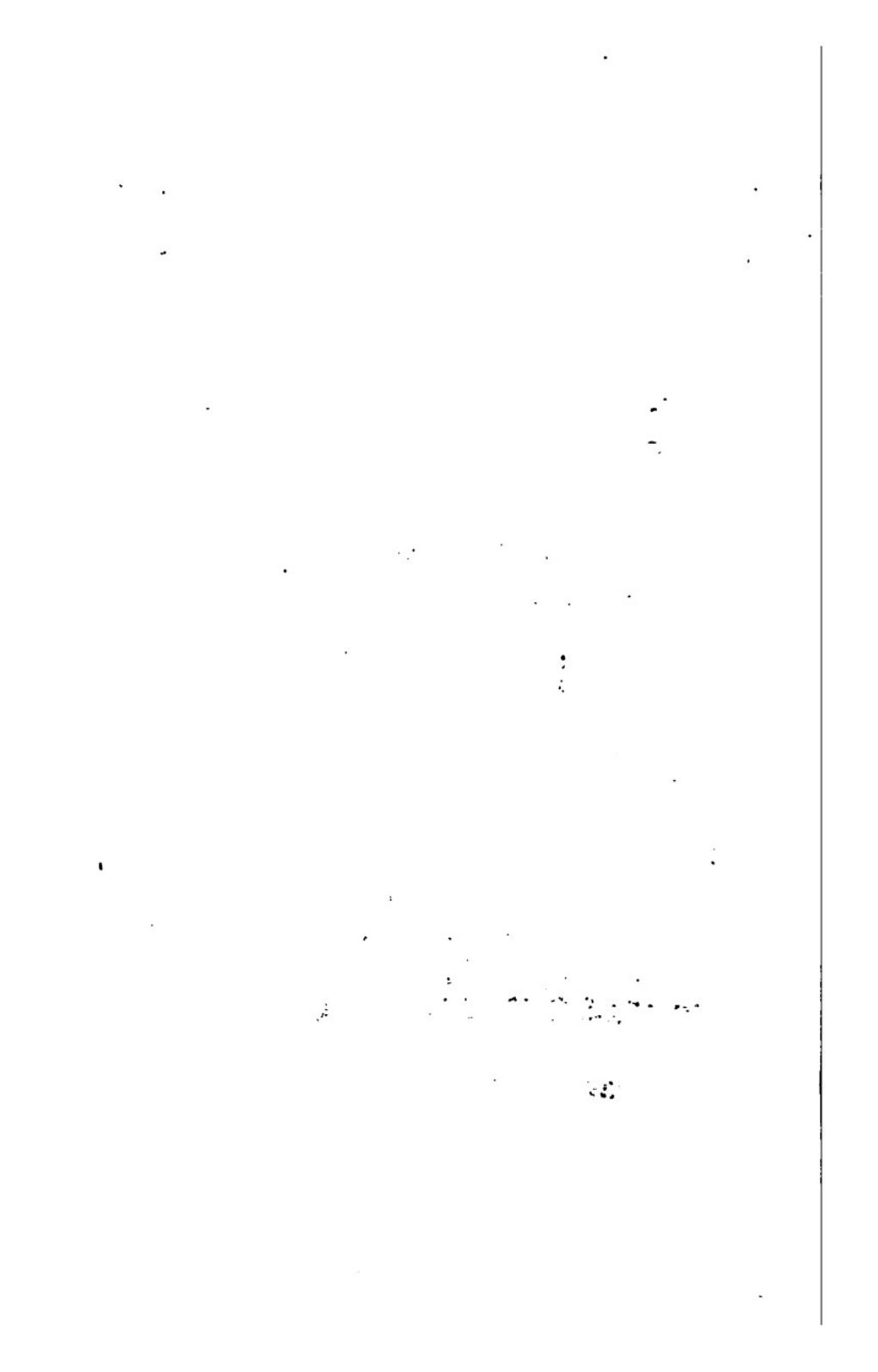
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